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THE JOHN A. VAN BEUREN STUDIES IN  
**LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS**

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TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FOUR • NUMBER 3

James B. Stockdale  
on Leadership, Ethics,  
and Education

Thomas J. Gibbons, Timothy J. Demy, and Gina Granados Palmer  
General Editors



Selected Articles from the Naval War College Archives

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE PRESS  
Newport, Rhode Island

James B. Stockdale  
on Leadership,  
Ethics, and  
Education



## **NAVAL WAR COLLEGE VAN BEUREN STUDIES IN LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS NO. 3**

The John A. van Beuren Studies in Leadership and Ethics series of publications was established to advance scholarship and publish thought-provoking works of analysis in the fields of leadership and ethics, with special attention to their application to the military; to further CNO initiatives in leadership and ethics; to help educate U.S. Naval War College students; and to help inform the joint force. The U.S. Naval War College and the Naval War College Press thank the Naval War College Foundation and the Alletta Morris McBean Charitable Trust for their generous support.

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175

H E Hugo

(Gift from P. Rheinboldt) - Spring '62

# The Enchiridion

By  
EPICTETUS

Epictetus Enchiridion  
trans. G. Ziegler  
1925  
P. 100 M. 100

The Little Library  
of Liberal Arts

Admiral Stockdale's copy of *The Enchiridion*, from 1962  
Source: James B. Stockdale II

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

My father's affection for philosophy and the work and writing he did in the field started simply because he was curious. It was 1962, and he had been promoted to commander while in graduate school. He'd finished his thesis ("Taiwan and the Sino-Soviet Dispute") and the other requirements for his master's degree a little ahead of schedule. So he wandered across the quad at Stanford and, while walking down a quiet hall (as if the scene were written for a movie script) he heard someone call out, "May I be of some help?" The voice was that of Philip Rhinelander, who (as we later mused) became Dad's major professor for a "vocational doctorate" in survival and leadership.

Three months of tutoring and classes culminated late one afternoon when Rhinelander said, "You're a military man. You need a handbook for your work." With that, he reached to a high shelf and gave Dad a weathered copy of *The Enchiridion* by Epictetus. The handwriting, underlining, and notes of two or three previous owners, including Rhinelander himself, filled the printed pages. That original copy (a pamphlet, really) sits on my bookshelf now. When I want to feel close to Dad, I carefully leaf through its frayed pages—the pages he absorbed over time, with such care and affection. Again, it all grew out of curiosity—and it changed Dad's life, our family's life, and the lives of hundreds of men with whom Dad would serve in a political prison over most of the next decade. The day after the two men said their good-byes, our family left our small hacienda in Los Altos Hills and trundled down Route 101 for San Diego. School was over, and Commander Stockdale was back "on the line" as executive officer of VF-51.

He later would contribute almost everything he knew about philosophy during classes at the Naval War College. In this volume, the editors have researched the Stockdale collection in the archives at the Naval War College and selected an assortment of speeches, correspondence, and articles written by my father that highlight his views about leadership, ethics, and education. Most of the material has been out of print for several years or stored in the archives and not readily available to the public. The intent of this book is to bring this material out into the light of day and share it with anyone interested in reading about the Stockdale legacy and the importance of my father's thoughts and their applicability today.

My father would have been proud of the work the editors have done to preserve his thoughts and to share them with each of you; first and foremost, Dad was a teacher.

He relished being in the classroom and working with others. His time at the Naval War College and later at the Hoover Institution at Stanford was some of his most enjoyable years. The Foundations of Moral Obligation elective course that he developed and taught more than forty years ago is still one of the most popular courses at the Naval War College. He invited Dr. Joe Brennan from Columbia University to coteach with him, and they became lifelong friends.

Dad was also a prolific author and he shared what he wrote with Joe Brennan, who often edited his work. Fortunately, Dr. Brennan kept much of that material and eventually donated it to the Naval War College, allowing the editors to collate Dad's treatises, along with other work that was part of Dad's correspondence from his years as President of the Naval War College. Dad and Joe were very close, and differences in their styles indicate that Brennan likely provided an initial edit of the unpublished manuscript presented in this book, which Dad titled "Life of the Mind in Captivity."

Dad learned valuable lessons about leadership throughout his career in the Navy and wrote about them during his second career as an academic. After spending seven and a half years as a prisoner of war (POW) in North Vietnam, he returned to the United States in 1973. He received the Medal of Honor from President Gerald R. Ford three years later. He often referred to his time spent leading POWs in their resistance as one of the best leadership laboratories one could experience; yet he always credited his success to his subordinates imprisoned with him. This book highlights some of Dad's leadership lessons and his thoughts on the importance of education and ethics.

The editors have selected material that gives the reader a glimpse into Dad's personality and the things he believed were important. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as I have, and that it will give you much on which to reflect.

James B. Stockdale II

# FOREWORD

## **James Bond Stockdale—Exemplary Leader**

I watched him from my hidden vantage point as he hobbled in on crutches, his leg in a huge cast and his shoulder bandaged heavily. The guards put him in the cell next to mine. I had been watching from the transom over the door to cell no. 2 in Heartbreak Hotel, a small cellblock that was part of Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi—what we called, and the world came to know as, the Hanoi Hilton.

Cdr. Jim Stockdale was now part of our small group of seven, and we came to know him as CAG, the acronym for Commander, Carrier Air Group. His physical condition was dire, with a shattered leg, a broken shoulder, a broken back, and many other injuries, and he was not at all sure he would make it. So he told all of us the story of his shoot-down, capture, and journey to Hanoi since it began on 9 September 1965, just a little over six weeks before that day in October. He told us because he wanted to ensure that his family and the Navy knew what had happened to him.

Despite his injuries, he immediately began to exert his leadership and assume the command responsibilities that were thrust on him. As the senior naval officer for the entire length of our captivity in North Vietnam, his leadership by word and deed was critical to the achievement in 1973 of our goal to “Return with Honor.”

I certainly did not know it at the time, but Jim Stockdale was to have a profound influence on my life in prison and on the lives of all prisoners of war (POWs) held in North Vietnam. His leadership proved to be one of the strong bonds that drew us all together as the 4th Allied POW Wing. CAG’s leadership was defined by a combination of qualities that made him unique among the handful of senior ranking officers who led and inspired us to do more than we ever thought we could. His courage, toughness, patriotism, loyalty, honesty, and devotion to duty were legendary, but it was his intellect and his study of philosophy that set him apart.

For all of this, he and the others who “stepped up to the (leadership) plate” paid a much heavier price in terms of personal suffering than most of us more junior officers. The Medal of Honor that he received for his actions certainly was deserved, but was small compensation.

However, the time in prison was not the last occasion on which CAG would influence my life in a profound way, and the later instance would change the direction of my life. In 1978, I arrived in Newport, Rhode Island, at the Naval War College as a student—and the President was Vice Admiral Stockdale. He was in the process of putting his wartime experiences to use in analyzing the psychological, philosophical, and moral dimensions of war and captivity. One of his lasting contributions to the College was the establishment of the electives program, which added a new and important dimension to the War College academic experience. The most popular elective was Foundations of Moral Obligation, which Stockdale and philosopher Joseph Brennan developed to provide War College senior and midgrade officers with the philosophical and moral background for ethical decision-making. Many hundreds of students have benefited from this study, and I hope many more will do so in the future, as this course is still being taught at the College.

At Stockdale's urging, I remained at the College on the Strategy and Policy faculty, and so found my calling in life for the next twenty-eight years.

Stockdale continued to write for the rest of his life, drawing on his experiences to impart to others his values and his views on leadership and ethics and their applicability—especially in times of crisis. Readers of this volume will discern quickly that Stockdale's work is as timely and relevant for military leaders today as it was when he wrote this material many years ago. I commend this volume to you in hopes that you, too, will be influenced by and learn from this remarkable leader.

Commander Porter Halyburton, USN (Ret.)  
 America's Fortieth Vietnam POW  
 17 October 1965–12 February 1973  
 Professor Emeritus, Naval War College

# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The items in this volume are drawn from the archives of the Naval War College and represent writings of Admiral Stockdale about leadership, ethics, and education. Among the materials presented are published and unpublished speeches, letters, short articles, and a manuscript. Some of the material has been published previously, while some of it is being presented for the first time. The latter materials are presented essentially unedited so that readers and researchers have the material as Stockdale wrote it originally.

Readers will find recurring themes in Admiral Stockdale's writings; he wove his ideas and values into every one of his oral and written works, creating a tapestry, in much the same way that a composer repeats and then varies a theme in a musical composition. Stockdale understood that values have consequences; thematic repetition of ideas emphasizes their importance.

Because of his belief in the importance of ideas, and coupling that belief with his experiences in Vietnam, Admiral Stockdale taught a unique elective at the Naval War College, titled Foundations of Moral Obligation. That course continues to the present, carrying on Stockdale's values and legacy.

Admiral Stockdale's son, Dr. James B. Stockdale II, opens the work with reminiscences of, and the importance of ideas to, his father. Fellow POW and Naval War College professor emeritus Porter Halyburton provides insight on Stockdale's leadership while in captivity and the role of ethics in leadership.

A special thanks to Jim Stockdale and the Stockdale family for their interest and ongoing support in perpetuating Admiral Stockdale's legacy. The editors and team at the Naval War College Press, including Dr. Carnes Lord and Dr. Robert Ayer, have been exceptionally supportive and helpful in bringing this work to fruition. Thanks are due to the faculty and staff at the Hattendorf Historical Center and the Naval War College Archives, especially Dr. John Hattendorf, Dr. David Kohnen, Elizabeth Delmage, and Stacie Parillo. Permissions to reprint portions of the book's contents have been received from several sources, acknowledged in those sections of the book; we appreciate the permissions granted.

## **Congressional Medal of Honor Citation, 4 March 1976**

Three years after returning from captivity in North Vietnam, Stockdale received the Congressional Medal of Honor from President Gerald R. Ford, in a ceremony at the White House. The citation highlights one of his many acts of heroism and leadership during his long captivity.



**Source:** U.S. Navy photo

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The President of the United States in the name of The Congress  
takes pleasure in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR to

**REAR ADMIRAL JAMES B. STOCKDALE**  
**UNITED STATES NAVY**

for service as set forth in the following  
CITATION:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on 4 September 1969 while senior naval officer in the Prisoner of War camps of North Vietnam. Recognized by his captors as the leader in the Prisoners of War resistance to interrogation and in their refusal to participate in propaganda exploitation, Rear Admiral (then Captain) Stockdale was singled out for interrogation and attendant torture after he was detected in a covert communications attempt. Sensing the start of another purge, and aware that his earlier efforts at self-disfiguration to dissuade his captors from exploiting him for propaganda purposes had resulted in cruel and agonizing punishment, Rear Admiral Stockdale resolved to make himself a symbol of resistance regardless of personal sacrifices. He deliberately inflicted a near-mortal wound to his person in order to convince his captors of his willingness to give up his life rather than capitulate. He was subsequently discovered and revived by the North Vietnamese who, convinced of his indomitable spirit, abated in their employment of excessive harassment and torture toward all of the Prisoners of War. By his heroic action, at great peril to himself, he earned the everlasting gratitude of his fellow prisoners and of his country. Rear Admiral Stockdale's valiant leadership and extraordinary courage in a hostile environment sustain and enhance the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Gerald R. Ford

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## **Section 1**

### **Speeches**

## **“Education for Leadership and Survival,” 18 February 1977**

***South Kent Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1977), pp. 9–14**

**Revised 14 November 1981**

This essay was derived from a speech originally given to the Connecticut Headmasters Association at South Kent School, and subsequently was published in the school's magazine. Four years later, Stockdale revised the speech, and the resultant manuscript, deposited in the Naval War College Archives, is presented here. At the time he made the revision, Stockdale was a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

He highlights ten leadership lessons, as follows:

1. You are your brother's keeper.
2. Life is not fair.
3. Duty before defiance.
4. Compulsion and free will can coexist.
5. Every man can be more than he is.
6. Freedom and equality are a trade-off.
7. People do not like to be programmed.
8. Living in harmonious ant heaps is contrary to human nature.
9. The self-discipline of Stoicism has everyday application.
10. Moral responsibility cannot be evaded.

# EDUCATION FOR LEADERSHIP AND SURVIVAL

In the environment of most educational institutions, the subject of leadership is addressed as part of courses dealing with values, tradition, sociology, management, and so on. In one sense, that's the way it must be, for leadership is not a true discipline. It has no body of distinctive literature, no universally recognized spokesmen or established authorities, no unique assumptions, and even the definition of leadership has raised unanswered questions. Yet the importance of leadership in all sectors of our society has never been greater than now. On the basis of my experience, in this paper I will briefly review the limitations and pitfalls that face someone trying to teach leadership, offer an inductive framework for course design, and suggest some teachable and learnable truths that I believe underpin good leaders. Reading lists that I have used are appended. [See appendix G, "Foundations of Moral Obligation Reading List."]

## The Leadership Teacher's Territory

At the outset, there are several key limitations to teaching any leadership course. Mechanically, teaching leadership is much different than instruction in the sciences where solutions or courses of action can be observed, proved, and repeated in the controlled environment of a laboratory. Some of the humanities can be taught by repetition and feedback. Teaching leadership is a much more complex task, however, particularly when the students are successful men and women at mid-career; there will be disagreements on methodology, qualifications of those teaching, and what should be taught. And then there is the problem of not being able to settle these arguments once the course is completed. One can't measure an increase in leadership ability; it's impossible to test before the course and test after it to see how much has been learned or what competence

level may have been achieved. Leadership can be tested only in a real-life crisis. Thus, practicality dictates that these arguments must be largely ignored. The problem just has to be gotten on with. The teacher of leadership must design a curriculum, develop a reading list, and—probably most of all—be the sort of person who can draw a crowd. In my view, pedagogical consensus on these questions is neither possible nor necessary.

In point of fact, it is probably necessary to forgo pedagogical consistency in favor of a “mixed bag.” Students will expect, and may profit from, the currently popular “motivational” approaches. I refer to the “how to” courses which in quick and efficient flip-chart style cover “how to” project yourself, “how to” interact, “how to” communicate, give ten handy-dandy check-off points on interviewing a prospective employee, and so on.

I will drop further discussion of that side of the house, and confine the rest of my remarks to what might be called the “classical” content of leadership education. In the July 27th, 1981, issue of *Industry Week*, Dr. John Flaherty, professor of management at Pace University, makes my plea for me: “Management must learn to view the enterprise as an institutional component of the larger society and think through the company’s evolving societal mission. A systematic study of the humanities can help minimize the intellectual vulnerabilities that thwart management’s human and social endeavors.” My introduction of the course Foundations of Moral Obligation at the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, several years ago—a course for the 35 to 45-year age group of highly successful midcareer military officers of all services and government civilian executives of comparable responsibilities—stemmed from even stronger feelings on my part. It seemed to me that the mentality of our military leaders, indeed the mentality of the bulk of both military and civilian midlevel executives in the Pentagon, was becoming largely that of pedestrian functionaries. That in itself is a harmless enough state of affairs as long as “business as usual,” “riding the bicycle of bureaucratic procedure,” continues to be the order of the day. But my experience as a fighter pilot operating from aircraft carriers at sea, firsthand observations on the battle scene and bureaucratic scene as the Vietnam War started, and revelations in prison camp, drove home to me the fact that such a “how to” mind-set breeds disaster when the unexpected occurs, when it becomes necessary to steer an institution into uncharted waters.

Moreover, I believe that every factor that prompted my originating my course is equally applicable to the civilian sector. Throughout our society we need people up front who are bored to death with business as usual but are imaginative, educated, and eager to handle the unexpected.

In my view, the single most important foundation for any leadership course is history. That discipline gives perspective to the problems of the present and drives home the point that there is really very little new under the sun. Without familiarity with the natural yardstick of 4,000 years of recorded history, busy people, particularly busy opportunists, have a tendency to see their dilemmas as so unique and unprecedented that they deserve to make exceptions to law, custom, or morality in their own favor to get around them. We can all think of several disastrous consequences of this short-sighted dodge within the last decade.

One’s problems should be candled against the light and wisdom of the past. That remained the bedrock of my course. Classic thinkers conceived disciplines and bodies

of thought that mankind has used profitably over the centuries to solve problems. To ignore this fund of wisdom is the epitome of vanity. In the words of my predecessor at Newport, Alfred Thayer Mahan, “the great warrior must study history.”

Of course, on a day-to-day basis, some people get along well enough by leaving considerations of good ends and right actions to their intuitive responses. In the highly structured bureaucratic environments so prevalent today, there is a great temptation to let personal standards go at that. The exponential rise in the flow of communication, particularly of the printed word within organizations, the directives with their endless stream of particularized guidance, programmatic blueprints, acronyms, and ever-new buzzwords, tends to deaden the moral sensibilities of the best of us. The way of life on the treadmill, following the horde down the prescribed track by the numbers, gives one the false sense of security that personal philosophies of ordered values will be issued by “the system” when the need arises.

In the military, the twists and turns of the fortunes of war have a way of throwing operational commanders out into new decision-making territory where all previous bets are off, and, needless to say, where there is no one to issue philosophical survival kits. One can find himself in a position of not only having to establish law for himself, but of being obliged to write it for others and demand their compliance. This can be a shockingly new ball game—in which the dishonesty of issuing orders that cannot be obeyed, the willingness to commit oneself to the full consequences implicit in one’s policies, the consideration of the possibility that the middle road may lead straight to the bull’s-eye of disaster, and the squarely faced realization that one’s orders will carry no more authority than the issuer is willing to give them by carrying them out himself by example, replace the usual considerations of conformity, bureaucratic ass-covering, and measured “reasonableness.” Who’s to say that the twists and turns of the fortunes of politics, economics, and social revolution might not thrust leaders in all fields out on a similar limb? I think any leadership course should look at it from this angle. At least it tends to focus one’s attention.

This brings us right down to the fact that philosophy is an equally logical discipline from which to draw insights and inspirations into leadership. In my view, the opposite approach of using trendy psychological chitchat case-study sessions usually leaves the class in a welter of relativism. In fact, current literature tells me that the social sciences have not yet outgrown the ideology of relativism, an egalitarianism of ideas, a culture-centered positivism, allegedly “scientific,” that most philosophers have long since called into question. If one leads men into battle while committed to the idea that each empirically unverifiable value judgment is just as good as the next, he’s in for trouble. There have to be public-service applications—professional, ethical, and practical business—of this same need for traditional commitment. Thus, I think offerings of a discipline whose founder (Socrates) was committed to the position that there is such a thing as central, objective truth, and that what is “just” transcends self-interest, provide a sensible contrast to much of today’s management and leadership literature. Thus it is philosophy and high-quality “ultimate situation” literature that I recommend concentrating on. My suggestions include the Socratic dialogues of Plato; Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*; Kant’s *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*; Mill’s *Utilitarianism*; Koestler’s

*Darkness at Noon*; Melville's *Billy Budd*; Conrad's *Typhoon*; Camus' *The Plague*. (See reading lists appended.)

## Leadership Course Design

One of the most productive results of my course was the evolution of an inductive framework that gave focus to certain universal conclusions that are broad enough to handle most situations yet specific enough to describe much of what the leader will experience. This allows the teacher to draw on many different disciplines and fields of study—literature, history, art, science—to illustrate these principles that seem to be valid and constructive without regard to temporal or spatial variance. The level of instruction can be tailored to the students' needs, level of familiarity, and general academic acumen. Some of the principles are hard to swallow and may initially excite some opposition. However, the ten I list herein (for brevity, many in summary form) evolved during the several times I taught the course and have come about as a result of study and experience rather than from abstract "course planning." The fundamental presumption is that the student will eventually reach similar conclusions on his own, without being pushed, pulled, or manipulated toward them. These principles, distilled from many sources, may come in an infinite number of variations, but I believe that they are valid under all conditions, in peace, war, behind a desk in the heart of a corporation, or in the cockpit of a jet fighter. In that sense, they are immutable and I am convinced that those that are not accepted by students during the course will be discovered eventually via experience.

### **Lesson #1: You Are Your Brother's Keeper**

In an extortion environment—that is, in a community where people are trying to manipulate others, be it a prison, a rigid hierarchical organization, or a bloated bureaucracy—there is always the temptation to better one's own position by making tacit "deals," by telling half-truths or by avoiding the truth. Yet sooner or later it becomes clear that the greatest good for you, and for the greatest number of your fellow "inmates"—the key to happiness, self-respect, indeed survival itself—lies in submerging one's individual instincts for self-preservation into the lowest common denominator of universal solidarity. Many will be skeptical of the practicality of such ideals that seem to ask more of man than human nature might be thought to allow. However, united magnanimous behavior can become a reality when man looks over the edge and sees the bottom of the barrel. At that time, "unity over self" takes on a new meaning. It becomes a practical guide to action rather than just a slogan. The opportunist may make significant short-term gains by walking over his fellow workers, by taking credit for their good work, or by superficial theatrics. But for each time he loses faith with his peers, he forfeits some of his self-respect. As the 19th-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt wrote, "honor is often what remains after faith, love, and hope are lost." Hanging together, watching out for the other guy, can become a great source of strength. The Stoic philosopher Epictetus has said, "If I can get the things I need with the preservation of my honor and fidelity and self-respect, show me the way and I will get them. But, if you require me to lose my own

proper good that you may gain what is not good, consider how unreasonable and foolish you are.” Thus, in any way, to betray, to disillusion, or to let down those conscientious men around you is to lose one’s proper good. You can’t go it alone.

### **Lesson #2: Life Is Not Fair**

The existence of evil in the world has produced one of the oldest problems that humankind has pondered; man has had a most difficult time accommodating himself to it. There is no moral economy in this universe wherein virtue is rewarded and evil punished. To come unglued when you first discover this hardest lesson of life, particularly when you’re under pressure, is to lay yourself open to destruction. Life’s rosy lining is a creation of the optimist, and under pressure the optimist may be a hazard to navigation. Today the statement that life is not fair draws ridicule, but it’s true nevertheless. For that interpretation of a good man’s defeat I prefer the original poem of the Book of Job—the way it was before some ancient revisionist historian spliced on a happy ending. The story of Job goes a long way in explaining the “Why me?” of failure. That God can allow evil to be visited upon upright and honest men is something we must be prepared to deal with. People find that message difficult to live with. Yet, once accepted, it can obviate the thoughts of being punished for past actions. The story starts by establishing that Job was the most honorable of men. Then he lost all his goods and his reputation. His friends badgered him to admit his sins, but he knew that he had made no errors. Here was a good man who came to unexplained and unjustified grief without the solace of reason or logic. To handle tragedy may indeed be the mark of an educated man or woman, for one of the principal goals of education must be to prepare people for failure.

### **Lesson #3: Duty before Defiance**

To illustrate this principle, I recommend contrasting the example of Socrates with that of Thoreau. At his trial, Socrates made the point that he owed it to Athens not to disillusion the citizens about its laws. He would defy the system only as an absolute exception, only when he was positive that what it was asking him to do was dishonorable, loathsome, evil. When one was not positive whether the actions required by the law of the land were good or evil, Socrates advocated going along with the system. On the other hand, according to Thoreau, “when in doubt, check out.” Thoreau went along with the system only when it supported his immediate whim. He appointed himself arbiter of what was just and unjust; his slogan was, “An unjust law? Disobey it at once!” A comparison of Plato’s dialogue *Crito* and Thoreau’s “Essay on Civil Disobedience” is in order here.

### **Lesson #4: Compulsion and Free Will Can Co-exist**

Aristotle laid down the law on this one. A sea captain orders a cargo jettisoned in a storm. The wind brought about this action, yet the Captain must make the decision. “Considering the action itself,” says Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*, “nobody would voluntarily throw away property; but when it is a matter of saving the lives of the crew and passengers, any sensible man would do so.” Aristotle was the old hard-headed scientist,

the man of common sense. He understood the power of compulsion, of force, of conscience, but he wouldn't buy off on an emotional slogan. I doubt that he would buy the plea "I spilled my guts because I was being tortured" at face value without examining it. "What sort of torture was being employed?" "To what degree were you incapacitated?" "How much information did you give?" "Did the enemy know you had the information you gave them?," and so on. He would not be comfortable with metaphors like "brain-washing," or "breaking." They lack definition and are an invitation to self-indulgence, to laying off the blame for individual acts of decision to some third party or disinterested third force. "Exactly what do you mean by those expressions?," he would inquire. Aristotle tells us to look beyond buzzwords and ill-defined expressions when forming opinions about whether acts are to be justified or condemned. More specific information is required.

### **Lesson #5: Every Man Can Be More Than He Is**

Aristotle pointed out that persuasion is one of the primary responsibilities of any leader and categorized the methods of approach as appeal to reason (*logos*), appeal to emotion (*pathos*), and the appeal of the good character of the leader (*ethos*). Particularly in areas where there is no certain answer, *ethos* is the most persuasive. The Greek philosopher taught that every living thing strives to grow and flourish, aiming toward its particular end or good. Twenty-two centuries later, Goethe wrote that you limit a person's potential by appealing to what he is; rather, you should appeal to what he might be. "Become what you are!," the poet said. I once asked Coach Woody Hayes if he had any special leadership techniques that would help explain his teams' phenomenal win-loss record in Big Ten football. Woody told me, "If I had any, it was just being able to convince those boys that they had a lot more heart and power in them than they thought they did."

### **Lesson #6: Freedom and Equality Are a Tradeoff**

If you push freedom to the limit, you lose equality; if you subordinate every social value to equality, you're going to lose freedom. The late Will and Ariel Durant in the chapter called "Biology and History" in their final summarizing book entitled *The Lessons of History* wrote that "Nature smiles at the union of freedom and equality in our utopias. For freedom and equality are sworn and everlasting enemies, and when one prevails the other dies." William Manchester writes of a "leveling of America" type of egalitarianism which he says contradicts our national and even our Western heritage. In recent years as a nation we have seen a growing ideology of personal relativism that tolerates, even honors, a lack of intellectual and ethical discrimination; this in turn has convinced all too many of our citizens that they're *good* simply because they are what they *are*. Such people's slogan, says Lionel Trilling in "Sincerity and Authenticity," is, "Every man a Christ." This has become the motto of what Tom Wolfe calls the "Me Generation."

### **Lesson #7: People Do Not Like to Be Programmed**

You can't force people to do what you think is good for them; you can't persuade many of them to act even in their own rational self-interest. A line of thinkers and writers

from Mill to Dostoyevsky make this clear. The narrator in Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* says that some men all of the time and all men some of the time knowingly will do what is clearly to their disadvantage if only because they do not like to be manipulated by carrot-and-stick enticements and coercions. "I will not be a piano key and vibrate at the assigned frequency every time I am cued," says the Underground Man, "I will not bow to the tyranny of reason." This is a plea that any good leader understands.

### **Lesson #8: Living in Harmonious Ant Heaps Is Contrary to Man's Nature**

This principle is straight out of Solzhenitsyn's Gulag novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, as well as Dostoyevsky's story about the Grand Inquisitor from *The Brothers Karamazov*. Given a choice, says the Inquisitor to Christ, people will choose order over freedom. Freedom is a heavy burden, and people want to get rid of it. Reason: if you are free, you know you are responsible for your actions. It's easier to say the Devil made me do it—or my superiors, or my unhappy childhood, or my business interests.

### **Lesson #9: The Self-Discipline of Stoicism Has Everyday Application**

The lessons in Epictetus's *Enchiridion* may come hard to the martini-drinking fighter pilot or the swinging executive with all the right contacts, but the Stoic philosopher's strong medicine is worth taking. Take it from one who knows how unexpectedly you can be trapped in a web of adversity, suffering, and cruelty. Epictetus tells us we must distinguish between what is in our power to do and what is not. Don't complain, he says, about what happens to you if there is nothing you can do to change it. The one thing nobody can touch is your will, and it is your will that determines your attitude toward life. As a prisoner of war in a German prison camp during World War II, the French philosopher Sartre said to a priest, a fellow prisoner, "The important thing is not what they've done to us; it's what *we* do with what was done to us."

### **Lesson #10: Moral Responsibility Cannot Be Evaded**

Whether you are a geneticist trying to unlock the secrets of life and its creation or a bureaucrat attempting to manipulate a nation's view of itself—pro or con—you cannot use your profession as a shield against responsibility for your actions. A person is the sum of his deeds, and the responsibility for them rests squarely on his own shoulders. We are not born good, says Aristotle, we become good by building a good character through the habit of right actions. "Man is not born with a soul," says Unamuno, "he dies with one he has manufactured."

## **Key Leadership Traits That Must Be Acquired**

With these principles in mind, what, then, makes good leaders? First, they need to be moralists—not just poseurs who sententiously exhort men to be good but thinkers who elucidate what the good is. This requires first and foremost a clear idea of right and wrong and the integrity to stand behind your assessment of any situation.

Integrity is one of those words that many people keep in that desk drawer labeled “too hard.” It is not a topic for the dinner table or the cocktail party. When supported with education, one’s integrity can give him something to rely on when his perspective seems to blur, when rules and principles seem to waver, and when he is faced with a hard choice of right and wrong. To urge people to develop it is not a statement of piety but of practical advice. Anyone who has lived in an intense extortion environment realizes that the most potent weapon an adversary can bring to bear is the manipulation of shame, the manipulation of his prey’s shame. A clear conscience is one’s only protection.

When we are down to the wire and the choices are limited, there is something in all of us that prefers to work with loyal, steadfast plodders rather than devious geniuses. A disciplined life will encourage a commitment to a personal code of conduct, and from good habits a strength of character and resolve will grow. This is the solid foundation by which good is made clear—by action and example. A moralist can raise to the level of consciousness what lies unconscious among his followers, lifting them out of their everyday selves and into their better selves.

Also, there are times when our leaders must be jurists, when decisions will be based solely on their own ideas of fairness, their knowledge of the people who will be affected, and their strength of character. There will be times when there won’t be a textbook solution to go by. I’m not talking about petty legalistic arbitration or controls, but about hard decisions with seemingly endless complications. As jurists, our leaders must have the courage and wisdom to lay down—that is to say, to “write”—the law, and that is a weighty responsibility. Moreover, they need the self-discipline to withstand the inclination to duck a problem or hand it off; they must realize when they must take it head on. One note of caution, however: many “laws” necessarily will be unpopular, but they must never be unjust. Moreover, the leader must never write a law that cannot be obeyed. The job of a jurist is to guide others, not to put them in a “Catch-22” situation in which they are forced to choose between conflicting alternatives.

Our leaders will discover also that part of their duty will involve teaching. Every great leader I have known has been a great teacher, able to give those around him a sense of perspective and to set the moral, social, and motivational climate among his followers. This is not easy; this also takes wisdom and discipline and requires both the sensitivity to perceive philosophical disarray in one’s charges and the knowledge of how to put things in order. A leader must aspire to a strength, a compassion, and a conviction several octaves above that held sufficient by the workaday world. He must be at home under pressure and can never settle for the lifestyle or the outlook of that sheltered man on the street whom Joseph Conrad characterized as “skimming over the years of existence to sink gently into a placid grave, ignorant of life to the last, without ever having been made to see all it may contain of perfidy, of violence, and of terror.” The two greatest moralists of Western society, writes Gilbert Highet in his book *The Art of Teaching*, were also the greatest teachers: Socrates and Christ. Their lessons were not easy.

Glib, cerebral, detached people can get by in positions of authority until the pressure is on. But when the crunch develops, people cling to those they know they can trust—those who are not detached, but involved—those who have consciences, those who can repent, those who do not dodge unpleasantness. Such people can mete out punishment

and look their charges in the eye as they do it. In difficult situations, the leader with the heart—not the bleeding heart, not the soft heart, but the Old Testament heart, the hard heart—comes into his own. Even Christ, the prince of peace, knew there were times when one's duty was “not to send peace, but a sword.”

Another duty of a leader is to be a steward. This requires tending the flock—“washing their feet,” as well as cracking the whip. It takes compassion to realize that all men are not of the same mold. Stewardship requires knowledge and character and heart to boost others and show them the way. Civil War historian Douglas Southall Freeman described his formula for stewardship when he said that you have to know your stuff, to be a man, and to take care of your men. In John Ruskin's words, such a process is “painful, continual, and difficult . . . to be done by kindness, by watching, by warning, by precept, and by praise, but above all, by example.”

One final aspect of leadership is the frequent need to be a philosopher, able to understand and to explain the lack of moral economy in this universe. To say that is not to encourage resignation to fate but to acknowledge the need for forethought about how to cope with undeserved reverses. Just as the leader is expected to handle fear with courage, so also should we expect him to handle failure with emotional stability, or, as Plato might say, with endurance of the soul. That is not to say a leader should be a “good loser”; what he needs is the ability to meet personal defeat without succumbing to emotional paralysis and withdrawal, and without lashing out at scapegoats or inventing escapist solutions.

Humans seem to have an inborn need to believe that virtue will be rewarded and evil punished on this earth. When they come face to face with the fact that it is not so, they often take it hard and erratically. Faced with monstrous ingratitude from his children, King Lear found solace in insanity; the German people, swamped with merciless economic hardship, sought solace in Adolf Hitler. Aristotle had a name for the Greek drama about the good man with a flaw who comes to an unjustified bad end—*tragedy*. The control of tragedy in this sense is the job of the leader, indeed, the job of leadership education.

The only way I know to handle failure is to gain a historical perspective, to think about men who have lived successfully with failure in our religious and classical past. A verse from the book of Ecclesiastes says it well. It exactly describes the world to which I returned after eight years of isolation in prison: “I returned, and saw . . . that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”

The test of our future leaders' merit may well not lie in “hanging in there” when the light at the end of the tunnel is expected but rather in their persistence and continued performance of duty when there is no possibility that the light will ever show up. The kind of character required to meet such challenges has been all too rarely seen in these United States in the last couple of decades. Simpleminded efficiency and diligence just don't hack it. It's time to drop the bogus idea of human progress and go back to the classics and study human nature where it is accurately portrayed.

## **“Change of Command Address,” Naval War College, 13 October 1977**

Stockdale was well suited to command the Naval War College and had been preparing for this moment for many years. In this address, he speaks of advice he received from his longtime friend and former President of the College, Adm. Stansfield Turner, who encouraged him to “ignore all of us and get on about your own business.” Stockdale would do that over the next few months. He knew what he wanted to accomplish and started to work at it shortly after taking command.

Throughout the address, he discusses many of the great military leaders of the past: Sherman, Mahan, Clausewitz, and others. He also cites a work written by historians Will and Ariel Durant that indicated a critical defense climate; of the past four thousand years, only 268 were without war. Stockdale wanted students to be prepared for conflict and defense. He closes with a challenge to the faculty and students: “[W]e are involved in an enterprise that deserves our best attention. And I am glad to address it with you.”

## CHANGE OF COMMAND ADDRESS

Governor Garrahy, Admiral Holloway, ladies and gentlemen. As I savor this moment, which is the realization of at least ten years of dreams, I pray that today and in all my dealings with this College, “the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.”

Hunt Hardisty, you have clearly won the esteem of this College and of the City of Newport. And as I said before, somewhat facetiously, I wish you a long and productive tour in the Philippines, a long and successful tour at sea, and that after *all of those years* you come back and relieve me for a full tour as the President of this College. I accept from you a school that is on an even keel, with programs that are the envy of every senior service college in the United States (this fact came to me clearly during last week’s meeting of military college Presidents). I thank you for a faculty that is also second to none. It has been said that “everything depends on the person who stands in front of the classroom. The teacher is not an automatic fountain from which intellectual beverages may be obtained. He is either a witness or a stranger. To guide a pupil into the promised land, he must have been there himself.” This faculty has been there, and they hold the respect that goes with that qualification.

I spent this week with the Academic Department Heads. And, at the urging of Professor Phil Crowl, by way of preparation, I consulted The Oracle. If you remember Phil’s article in the *Naval War College Review*, you will recall that his is not The Oracle of Delphi but The Oracle of Newport, Rhode Island, a man I can now call my predecessor, Alfred Thayer Mahan. I’ve studied lectures Mahan gave here nearly one hundred years ago—one given in the year 1888 right over here at Founders Hall in the third year of his first term as President; another given four years later in 1892, just after he came back for his second term as President, delivered here to my right in what was then the brand-new Luce Hall. Besides their courtliness (they are always addressed to the “Gentlemen of the Navy,” which I thought rather classy), one of the first things to strike you is the timelessness of these talks. Their content verifies the wisdom of the philosophy he institutionalized here. In my words, “that in the profession of arms, historic evidence indicates that the method of their employment is at least as important to victory as their design, and that the capstone of a mature officer’s education should focus on style rather than hardware.” In Mahan’s words, “the great warrior must study history.”

Mahan is not blindly dogmatic and he is openly distrustful of simplistic historic analogies. But he nevertheless believes that an educated man with sufficient classical background can often perceive recognizable trends in events that occasionally allow him “that quickness to seize the decisive features of a situation and to apply at once the proper remedy, which the French call *coup d’œil*, a phrase for which I know no English equivalent.” He explains that what he speaks of is a memory bank full of historic facts that, after a fashion, form distinctive and educational patterns. Examples are facts such as that in the late 18th century, French armorers discovered a method of casting cannon barrels that not only improved their accuracy but made them much lighter. To the pedestrian officer the latter advantage was a convenience. But to the Corsican Corporal of Artillery with a sense of history, and more than a little genius, the change portended an entirely new and different utilization of the weapon. It was not to be towed slowly across the plains by oxen, but quickly across the Alps by horses. Forts were to be bypassed, firepower concentrated. What was to the man on the street a metallurgical event of convenience was to Napoleon a geopolitical event that led to the conquest of Europe. History is full of similar examples. In our age, what was to us a nuclear event was to Hyman Rickover quite a different thing.

Another of the timeless aspects of Mahan’s lectures was the clear evidence of the pressures and cross currents concerning War College course content that he experienced even when this school was in its infancy, the world’s first War College. Throughout his talks he’s obsessed with the definitions of practicality and theoreticalness. And he talks somewhat humorously of his contacts with friends in Washington when they ask him, as he steps out of the Army-Navy Club on a brisk evening, “Are you going back to the War College?” “Do you expect to have a session there?” “Yes,” he answers. One of his senior friends then sneers, “Are you going to do anything practical this time?” Offended, Mahan replies with questions like “What do you mean by practicality?” and so on and so forth. This theme is woven throughout his lectures. The preoccupation is there, and it is clear that he was under pressure. This pressure can still be felt.

Now, subject to possible direction by my boss, Admiral Holloway, I would like to state that I plan to make no abrupt changes in the curriculum. I get a lot of mail on this subject, from everybody from old retired acquaintances to boyhood friends. One letter that I got from a boyhood friend a few days ago read in part as follows: “[O]n the subject of the College curriculum, you mentioned that you have been bombarded with conflicting advice. That cross will be yours to bear as long as you are there. My advice is that you ignore all of us and get on about your own business.” That letter was dated the 3rd of October 1977 and signed by Stansfield Turner.

So I do this afternoon get on about this business of educating our most promising midcareer officers. And I do so with a sense of mission and, in all honesty, with a very comfortable degree of self-confidence. For although it will take me a few months to get up to speed on all the disciplines taught here—and I think they are the right disciplines—each in my view has blind spots in critical areas vis-à-vis “the nature of war itself.” On the national scale, failure to account for this has cost us dearly in the recent past.

If I can firmly establish and illuminate to the students here the inevitable blindnesses of these particularized specialties or disciplines in which we must work—blindness to the psychological and subjective, as well as the objective totality of the human experience we call war—I think I will have done something for my country.

We have, at times, made assumptions that did not account for such facts as: (1) War is a serious business; (2) People get mad in war; (3) The laws of logic are valueless in bargaining under those circumstances; and so on. We, they, everybody should be assumed to be ready to throw proffered options in the face of the enemy. After all, their and our honor is at stake. A force at war can't feint, and engage and disengage like an adagio dancer, and it's well to know that before you go into combat.

As the German soldier and philosopher Clausewitz has said, "war is nothing but a duel on a larger scale." And I think a professional military man can learn some bad habits by leading a life that is totally devoted to orderly processes. Duels, or street fights, are not orderly processes. Yet they are very good analogies to war.

In short, I don't think there is anything new under the sun, or that we're seeing the dawn of any new age. I think we can be grossly misled by statements of some of the so-called defense intellectuals of the sort not uncommonly appearing even now, in the post-Vietnam era. For example, I quote from a scholar in a recent issue of a highly respected journal. "Waging war is no different in principle from any other resource transformation process and should be just as eligible for the improvements in proficiency that have accrued elsewhere from technological substitution." My experience, and it has been rather recent, puts me back in old Clausewitz's camp. He said, "War is a special profession. However general its relation may be and even if all the male population of a country capable of bearing arms were able to practice it, war would still continue to be different and separate from any other activity which occupies the life of man." Another old warrior, William Tecumseh Sherman, said, "War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it."

In view of the fact that in searching 4,000 years of recorded history, Will and Ariel Durant could find only 268 years during which this earth saw no war, I think, faculty and students, that we are involved in an enterprise that deserves our best attention. And I am glad to address it with you

Thank you.

## **“Rhode Island Independence Sunday,” 7 May 1978**

Stockdale used his address at Trinity Church, Newport, Rhode Island, as an opportunity to present some of the material he had been reviewing for his new fall 1978 Naval War College elective, Foundations of Moral Obligation.

He discusses Viktor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning* and the importance of freedom to those whom the Germans imprisoned during World War II. Stockdale also mentions Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and the concept of the Grand Inquisitor.

He closes with a discussion of the brave Rhode Islanders who declared liberty from Great Britain in May 1776: “Rhode Islanders, above all other ex-colonials, were scarcely shy of accepting the obligation of seeking their own resolution of the problems of good and evil.”

# ADDRESS AT TRINITY CHURCH ON THE OCCASION OF RHODE ISLAND INDEPENDENCE SUNDAY

I am always curious as I sit in a pew and watch a military man in uniform take the pulpit at one of these patriotic worship services. What is he going to say? Is he going to attempt some acrobatics of logic and come down with one foot in the camp of preparedness and the other in the camp of pacifism? Is he going to suggest that no matter what, “God is on our side”? (An argument that has always seemed to me to be at least poor sportsmanship, if not in poor taste.)

So today I’m going to play it safe—safe and smart. Safe by staying out of modern politics, referring to nothing that’s been written within the last 100 years, and smart by using material that I needed to review anyway, in preparation for the philosophy course I’m going to teach this fall: Foundations of Moral Obligation.

So I’m going to stick to abstractions—the abstraction of human freedom. That seems appropriate. Today’s *Trinity Tower* devotes its front page to it. Revolutionary Rhode Islanders lived for it. Moreover, for this church service, my material deals with Christ’s conception of it.

Ex-prisoners, if you will notice, seem to be obsessed with human freedom. Many of you have probably read Viktor Frankl’s book *Man’s Search for Meaning*, in which he describes his fate in a German concentration camp. He could continue resistance as long as he remembered that he, alone, was in possession of the fundamental *freedom* of shaping his own attitude about what was going on.

This morning I’m going to refer to the writings of another ex-prisoner—Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky. A little background: Dostoyevsky was born in Moscow in 1821 of an aristocratic father and a bourgeois mother who died when he was 16. He was brought up by his father, a doctor, known to be miserly, greedy, and corrupt. The young man, educated as an engineer, entered the czar’s army as an officer and, although hardly a radical by nature, had by the age of 28 got himself arrested, court-martialed, and sentenced to death for conspiracy.

After 8 months in a high-security Moscow prison, he was taken into the courtyard one morning, and blindfolded before a firing squad. At the last minute, in a real-life drama, the czar’s messenger rode up on horseback with a reprieve. The conditions of the

reprieve were rather severe. Instead of being shot, he was to have 4 years in irons in a Siberian prison, plus an additional 8 years in exile from Moscow as a private soldier in a Siberian regiment. He paid his penance without bitterness. After the twelve years he returned to Moscow, became first a magazine writer, then a novelist, and now generally enjoys the reputation of being a Christian philosopher—a very orthodox, Eastern-church Christian.

Now, it's important that all here be aware of Dostoyevsky's legitimacy in scholarship, because the story I'm going to tell is scary and bizarre. Like many great novelists, he comes across with an artful meld of overstatement, exaggeration, and subtlety. It's an impressionistic story that means different things to different people—and thus I rather carefully read my remarks, and suggest that if I miss the point for you, you later read the story yourself.

What I'm talking about is really a story within a story. The book from which it comes was written when Dostoyevsky was 58, about a 100 years ago, and it's titled *The Brothers Karamazov*. *The Brothers*, as it is called in the philosophy trade, is the story of sons killing their detested father. (Perhaps Father Dostoyevsky was the model.) Don't cringe—that's not an unusual tragic theme. Sigmund Freud has classified *The Brothers* as one of the three greatest tragedies ever written, in the same league with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*—and all three deal with parricide.

The story within the story about human freedom is told by one of the Karamazov brothers to another. It is told by the second son, Ivan, whom I would classify as a cynic, to his youngest brother, Alyosha, who, like the author in his earlier days, was a novice in a monastery. (Alyosha was the name of Dostoyevsky's first son, who died at the age of 3.)

Both brothers agree that the story is a fantasy. The two characters are Christ and a 90-year-old cardinal, known as the Grand Inquisitor. This fantasy took place during the Spanish Inquisition, when, so the story goes, one morning in Seville, after burning several heretics at the stake, the cardinal notices a crowd coming up the street and recognizes the man about whom they are clustered as Christ. To get right to the point, the cardinal, after seeing Christ perform healing miracles, decides he must be executed to save the Church.

Before you jump to conclusions, there's a couple of very important points to understand about this fantasy. First, it was Christ. It was not a case of mistaken identity, and the cardinal knew it was Christ. Second, the cardinal was *not* a clerical bureaucrat or empire builder. He was too old to be ambitious to gain stature in the hierarchy of the Church, and almost too old to be vain. He is quite sympathetically portrayed as a clergyman who believed that mankind is best served not so much by seeking the bread of heaven as by being furnished the bread of earth, social services, and so on—of being protected from want and the ravages of war. The best way to serve man, the cardinal might say, is to protect him from himself.

For after a lifetime of thought, and a lifetime of study of the fate of mankind in the 15 centuries since the resurrection, the cardinal thought that Christ had failed to take advantage of the position God had given him on earth. As he later told him, "Thou didst reject the one infallible banner which was offered Thee to make all men bow down to Thee alone." Of course, he's referring to Christ's refusal to accept the three temptations

of Satan described by Matthew and Luke. He thought Christ was shortsighted and understood neither human nature nor the implications of Satan's three offers. I quote the cardinal again: "In those three questions the whole subsequent history of mankind is, as it were, brought together into one whole, . . . and in them are united all the unsolved historical contradictions of human nature." In summary, the clergyman was convinced that Christ, in his commitment to human freedom, in his insistence that man find his own way through the earthly maze of Good and Evil, had doomed man to self-destruction.

Specifically, Christ refused to turn stones into bread and said, "Man does not live by bread alone." The cardinal thought that by this Christ had set his standards for mankind too high, that he had forgone the opportunity to provide ample goods and services in the name of God, that he had unwittingly caused the formation of an elite group—the select few who could meet his high moral standards, thereby accentuating nature's uneven distribution of human excellence—and that this in turn had spawned religious wars and so on.

The second temptation, you will remember, was Christ's refusal to demonstrate his immortality by surviving a plunge off the pinnacle. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." By this, the cardinal thought that Christ had passed up his chance to offer mankind that miracle, that mystery, that authority which mortals so crave. In fact, he suggests that if man does not have "miracles, mysteries, and authority," he will invent them.

Throughout, with highly symbolic allusions, Dostoyevsky almost foretells the arrival of Hitler (an invented miracle), Lenin (who claimed to know what man really needed), and world federalists of various stripes—for the third temptation, as you will recall, came when Satan took Christ to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

Of course Christ refused, and in the cardinal's view thereby lost his opportunity to stop war by establishing a community of nations under his banner. For, as Dostoyevsky has his cardinal say, "It is to mankind's advantage to live all in one unanimous, harmonious antheap of universal unity."

(The real Dostoyevsky seems to me to occasionally creep out in the prose in spite of himself.)

The Grand Inquisitor was tough. When he saw Christ raise a girl from the dead he had immediately told the guards to take him to prison. And the next day he interrogated him (although that may be the wrong word, because Christ remained silent throughout). "Why didst Thou come to hinder us?" asked the cardinal. "Fifteen centuries ago Thou said 'I will make men free' and Thou thereby imposed an intolerable burden on men, and now they lay this freedom at our priests' feet with relief." As if economic burdens were not enough, the cardinal claimed Christ had imposed an even greater burden—a moral burden. "Nothing has brought mankind more suffering than freedom of conscience. Didst Thou forget that man prefers peace, even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil?" The Cardinal makes the point that humans are by nature rebellious, and even criticizes God when he says, "He who created these rebellious humans must have meant to mock them." This Grand Inquisitor goes on to describe the awfulness of men left to their own devices: "They will cast down temples and drench the earth with blood."

And then, enraged by Christ's silence, he continued, "Why dost Thou look silently and searchingly at me with Thy mild eyes? Be angry. I don't want Thy love, for I love Thee not. And what use is it for me to hide anything from Thee? Don't I know to Whom I am speaking?"

The younger Karamazov brother was incensed at such a story, as might well you be. The novice Alyosha declared: "You are merely telling me a story of a man who does not believe in God." He railed at his older brother, and asked with contempt, "How does it end?"

And Ivan replied, "When the Inquisitor ceased speaking he waited some time for his Prisoner to answer him. . . . The old man longed for Him to say something, however bitter and terrible. But [Christ] suddenly approached the old man in silence and softly kissed him on his bloodless, aged lips. That was all His answer. The old man shuddered. His lips moved. He went to the door, opened it, and said to Him, 'Go, and come no more . . . !' And he let Him out into the dark alleys of the town. The Prisoner went away."

"And the old man?" asked Alyosha. Ivan replied, "The kiss glows in his heart, but the old man adheres to his idea."

Rather an odd story, as ex-prisoners are wont to tell on occasion. And like the stories of T. E. Lawrence (*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*), and of several of us other ex-prisoners, it is subject to interpretation. I've already tipped my hand on how I interpret this one, as I presumed Dostoyevsky tipped his hand with his use of the word "antheap." Another tell-tale word is "clever," because at least twice the Cardinal refers to himself as one who has forsaken Christ and joined the other, "more clever" people. In one of his last punch lines, the Grand Inquisitor admonishes Christ by saying: "Thou didst lift men up and taught them to be proud. We, however, shall show them that they are weak and that they are only children. But we'll explain how we will make them happy and that childlike happiness is sweetest of all."

Today, we celebrate the memory of some Rhode Islanders who 202 years ago certainly did not come down on the side of the "childlike happiness" of serving even a benevolent master. They were free, self-determining souls in the true sense of the word—proud, brave, passionate, some cruel, some acquisitive, many generous, almost all conscience ridden (as only Protestant New Englanders can be), and all obsessed with independence and freedom—bearing all those burdens of which the Grand Inquisitor would have relieved them. Rhode Islanders, above all other ex-colonials, were scarcely shy of accepting the obligation of seeking their own resolution of the problems of good and evil. Each was dedicated to finding his own way to God. And they knew there was a price for that pride and that freedom and that independence—and periodically it has been paid in blood. But who wants to live in an antheap?

In early May of 1776, Rhode Island declared for liberty. Fourteen years later, in May of 1790, they committed themselves to the common pursuit of liberty with the other 12 colonies by signing a Constitution whose preamble states as its purpose, to "establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare." And I am one who believes that the *order* in which our Founding Fathers chose to list those purposes—that is, justice first, domestic tranquility second, defense third, and welfare fourth—was intentional.



## **“The Problems of Ethical Brinksmanship,” July 1978**

In this speech, delivered at the Taft School in Watertown, Connecticut, Stockdale describes his initial philosophy studies under Professor Philip Rhinelander at Stanford University. The experience changed Stockdale’s life; as he wrote, “I was never the same again.”

The lessons learned at Stanford were essential to him while imprisoned as a prisoner of war (POW) in Vietnam. “Of course it was in prison that philosophy became most valuable to me.” Stockdale was the senior ranking officer in captivity and assumed the role of commander of the American POWs.

Stockdale emphasizes the importance to prisoners of the man in the next cell: “Never seeing him, you grew over the years to love him. He was your link with sanity—your communication link with the rest of the prison.”

Stockdale reiterates critical lessons from his prison experience: “[E]very man should, through both formal education and tedious thought, commit himself to some philosophy of life, some defined values with which he can proceed confidently each day.” Stockdale adopted the Stoic values of Epictetus to serve as a guidepost throughout his life.

# THE PROBLEMS OF ETHICAL BRINKMANSHIP\*

Stanford University's Dean and philosophy professor Philip Rhineland used to give a course called *The Problems of Good and Evil*. His starting point was the Book of Job, and the message was that "Life is not fair." The course brought home the fact that man's life must make sense. Man seems to have submerged within him a need to believe that a moral economy in which virtue is rewarded and evil is punished prevails in this universe. When he discovers that the ways of the world seldom conform to this notion of "fairness," he often comes unglued unless he has thought it through beforehand. Man instinctively craves an ordered universe, not open-ended ethical systems in which each person "does his own thing" under the guise of "fulfilling himself." Mental health, emotional stability, and purposeful lives are built around accepted norms of behavior. When good and bad are so vaguely defined as to rob life of any meaning, there's trouble. When life does not make sense, man invents his own solutions—Hitler, for example. In his discussion of his life in a German concentration camp, Viktor Frankl expresses the thought that a man can resist only as long as his life has meaning. So if one believes that the religious hypothesis is to be discarded (and I personally do not discard it), then it follows that some other hypothesis should replace it.

Aristotle said, "All humans desire to know." People can't live with moral guidelines based on inconsistent patterns of popular slogans. Consciously or unconsciously, man has to have thought through the derivation of his idea of reasonable rules of behavior. If we are to consider the lessons of the '60s and how they might apply to the '80s, I think two of those lessons need to be dealt with at the outset. The first is that those without well-defined norms will probably fly off the handle when their values are tested. A second is that a society whose educators ignore its history, who choose not to enlighten and guide but to train, are contributing to its dissolution.

Perhaps a few words about who I am and how I got into the world of education while wearing a military uniform might be helpful to those questioning my choice of lessons: I was raised in a little town in Illinois, an only child, the son of upper-middle-class skeptics. In our home the quality of life was good, and conformity was not considered

\*Adapted from a two-part talk given at the Taft School Values Institute, July 9–14, 1978.

a measure of virtue; it was my idea to go to Sunday School. Like many of my generation, and probably as a result of World War II, I was a hero worshiper. In college, I was a member of a Naval Academy class full of hero worshipers, who had every intention of getting into the conflict, and wound up graduating as the war came to an end. It was as though we entered the arena to find that the only people still there were the janitors sweeping up the debris. This must have had some powerful psychological effect on us, because my class has produced the highest proportion of admirals and generals, lawyers, doctors, ministers, heads of the CIA, and presidents of the United States of any in Academy history. Another personal trait I would identify is that I am by nature a romantic. After commissioning, I satisfied this romantic drive in the postwar period with peacetime cruises and technical training by becoming first a carrier pilot, and then a test pilot at the Naval Aviation Test Center at Patuxent River, Maryland. It was there that I did my first teaching, as a flight instructor at the Test Pilot School. I was also an academic instructor sharing an office with a civilian PhD who taught me not only the aerodynamics and physics I needed for my course but the philosophy of science. I wrote my own book on aircraft performance, gave daily lectures, and had the time of my life. After that tour was up, I went back to the Fleet and for five years flew the fastest and best jet fighters in the world.

I then went to graduate school at Stanford, and I loved each of the twenty-four months of it. As a naval officer, I was enrolled in an interdepartmental program of history, political science, geography, and economics, with lots of time for excursions into other disciplines. Through this course, I entered the Navy's world of "planning," while others chose the world of "programming." "Planners" are those who see the world in more or less traditional terms, making estimates of service need on the basis of history, current events, threat, risk, and so forth. During those years when I was flying jet airplanes and studying at graduate school, other bureaucrats, the "programmers," were making deep inroads in government, and becoming institutionalized. Programming was in vogue.

The first "programmers" were what we knew as Kennedy's and McNamara's "whiz kids." I think of them when I read Michael Maccoby's description of the glamorous gamesmen. "Programmers" do not live in the classical world—they work the other side of the street. They live in the "real world" of the budget, of facts, of figures. They don't ask what we "need" for national defense. They realistically trace the budget and parcel it out. They are efficient, expedient, and cool, "analytically" slicing ancient dilemmas into neat chunks. They produced the planning, programming, and budgeting system around which the Pentagon still revolves, and also, incidentally, made the Vietnam War a logical iteration, invented the "body count," and tried to mold the military mind into its business counterpart. There were also "whiz kids" at my university—academic "whiz kids." These were the young professors who subtly built a case against what they called "fixed value systems." These were bad because they led to abstractions such as patriotism, military-industrial complexes, and esprit de corps. To give their shallow concepts a shroud of acceptability, these academic "whiz kids" had to assume, and endlessly repeated, that the past was no gauge for the future, that "we are now in a new age," that

nuclear weapons were so terrible and computers so intricate, that the world would never be the same, and so on.

The great professors on the campus were being overrun, and yet they scarcely seemed to notice it until it was too late. They lacked a party theoretician. Dr. Tony Sokol was my advisor the second year. He was his own theoretician. He was at retirement age and was thought of as a reactionary by the campus liberals. Though he did not advocate war, he considered it a possibility in the human predicament, and thus something that educated people should study. Will and Ariel Durant, in their small book *Lessons of History*, have observed that in the last 4,000 years of recorded history there have been only 268 free of war. Tony was a realist well versed in such lessons of history. Once he asked me what I was reading and I said, "Tony, you would be very happy with the selection of books I have chosen because they deal with your favorite subject, national defense. They are written by Brodie, Kahn, Schelling." (I gave him a whole string of names and books like *Strategy of Conflict*, etc.) His face turned purple. He said, "I do not read those books." I said, "Why not? This is your field, these are the modern strategists." And he replied, "Those people do not understand war. They are economists, and economics is driven by rationality." He said that people get mad in war, and they do not obey the economists' law of logic. I can still remember his remark: "These so-called intellectuals think they can play games with people in war, and—mark my word—they will get us in trouble."

Years later, I was lying in a cell listening to the street noises of Hanoi, and to our loudspeaker system in prison, ridiculing in pidgin English the ideas of these gamesmen's ploys of escalation and all the rest. It was then that I fully realized the wisdom of Tony's remarks. I also remember Tony scoffing at the idea of the dawning of a new age and the effect of nuclear weapons. He said that wisdom has not been turned upside down because of some technical device, and for that matter that the German people in the 100 [*sic*, Thirty] Years' War suffered 55% fatalities—a far greater death toll than even the wildest estimates for a nuclear exchange. He did not believe that nuclear war was good or desirable, but rather he felt that the advent of the bomb had neither changed the elements of the game of international politics nor overruled the laws of human nature. During that year, Tony gave me a lot of good advice; only once did his counsel fail. The latter was his remark, "Don't bother going to philosophy corner," when I told him I wanted to explore that field. He thought that I would waste time learning a new vocabulary, and that as a 38-year-old man of the world, I didn't need it.

Nevertheless, I did go against Tony's injunction and went over to that sacred area, and there I met Professor Rhinelander, and from then on at Stanford "philosophy corner" was my academic center of gravity. It seemed to me that finally I had found what I had been looking for. I could stretch my mind and bang against the stops of rationalism, empiricism, and so on. More importantly, I learned that there were few ideas or methods that I could conjure up that had not already been well discussed, dissected, and documented, by men of wisdom in the days of antiquity. Epictetus's mind was every bit as capable as Jonas Salk's. I learned to talk about God's existence, human frailty, immortality, and freedom in the non-self-conscious manner of critical thought.

I was never the same again. As a carrier pilot, some years later, on my way to my second cruise of the Vietnam War, I was able to lecture to my air wing on the subject of

personal commitment in limited war. My punch line—and I still think it's valid, and that even Aristotle would have been proud of me—was that limited war is a national concept and bears little on the obligations imposed on the individual: He who fights must be *totally* committed to the act. To rationalize pulling off high on a bombing run because he wanted to save his plane “for the future *real* threat to national security,” that the limited national commitment didn't require the best of him, was to run the risk of shame for the rest of his life. To paraphrase Bertrand Russell, “No form of caution is as damaging to human happiness as caution on the battlefield.”

Of course it was in prison that philosophy became most valuable to me. Soon after I arrived I fully realized the formidability of our opponents. In the pidgin English propaganda books printed in the late '50s that I glanced through, and based on my recent scholastic efforts in Far East history, I could tell that their summarization of the happenings of the previous 20 years left no possible cheap shots at American malfeasance undeveloped. The Vietnamese communists were well prepared for that war. They had packaged and spread hatred not only about American history, but American traits—you know, “Americans are really good guys at heart, they always give the kids candy bars.” Well, those Vietnamese kids had been coached on that. A wink was repaid with a spit in the face. Our interrogators had a schoolboy's knowledge of our stereotyped orientation. Often they would say, “You are pragmatic.” “Act in your own self-interest.” “Be fair minded.” “Meet us halfway.” Any student of Marxism will realize that these remarks were strictly tactical trial balloons. Anyone who spends a few hundred hours with communist interrogators or negotiators comes to realize that they are committed to the point of view that you are the victim of a warped personality by having been raised in a society of acquisitiveness and greed. They speak to their American counterparts on the same basis as American psychiatrists speak to their patients. They believe that they know us better than we know ourselves. “Meeting halfway” is contrary to dogma. Extortionists? Of course. I remember in an unguarded moment an interrogator laughing about nuclear weapons and saying, “Well, it doesn't matter now because you've got too many troops over here to use them anyway.” That to him was a real knee slapper. The party line was that criminals were to repent, but never to say anything they did not truly believe “in their hearts.” Once when I suggested that I would not sign an antiwar statement, for the tongue-in-cheek “reason” that “You wouldn't want me to sign anything I didn't believe, would you?,” the casual and frank reply was, “Are you shitting me? Don't you know what extortion is?”

It was of course within ourselves in prison that we met the greatest tests. You may wonder why more of us did not “cross over to the people's side,” as the Vietnamese demanded. The answer is that you have to be there to realize how simpleminded their case was and how opportunistic a person would have to be to damage his fellow Americans, which was the price of crossing over. It was a tough life, a life that brought to mind the wisdom of the Durants' observation that culture is a very thin veneer which superimposes itself over civilization, and that we are but one generation removed from barbarism. We were in the land of Epictetus, and most of us were alone. And for those skeptics who think I'm talking of something unreal, not part of this “new world,” I say in the most calm and candid manner that I have access to a survival-school environment

and that I can put any one of them in the land of Epictetus in less than three days, and that they will sit in their cells and shamelessly cry at the humiliation of soiling their pants.

The question was raised about heroes and our concept of them. I had my heroes in prison. They were not necessarily do-gooders, but were of sophisticated courage. Their courage was not so much the blind charge but that of endurance—the courage of which the ancient Greeks wrote. They were men of strength and resolution. I am thinking of Jon Reynolds, a man I whispered to in Heartbreak Hotel for five days before I realized, one, that he had no shirt in the cold weather; two, that he was in leg irons; and three, that he was having to be fed by the guard because he had two broken arms. Never a complaint. That boy's a graduate of Hartford's Trinity College, and the school should be proud of him. Another hero of mine, an escapee by the name of George McKnight, was a boxer at Oregon State University who later acquired a respiratory infection so serious that he had to be carried by his prison mates on a pallet. Offered a chance by his American commander to accept the Vietnamese offer to go home without strings attached, he gallantly sent back a message saying, "I will go over the wall or out the gate with you, but that's the only way I'll leave this prison."

Years of solitary confinement allow the maximum utilization of the mind's capacity. Constantly the mind generalizes; always it seeks to gather particulars and group them into general categories. What a contrast to life in the street, where particulars are the serviceable commodities. Another aspect of the solitary life was the nobility of thought it engendered. The most precious object in your life was the man in the next cell. Never seeing him, you grew over the years to love him. He was your link with sanity—your communication link with the rest of the prison. To have evil thoughts about him brought pangs of remorse, and when he was taken to the torture chamber often the time only permitted the quick tapped message "I love you." In that prison I saw also the wisdom of Viktor Frankl's remarks that even under the most severe circumstances, freedom remains. A man always has the last freedom, and that is that of forming an *attitude* about what goes on about you.

One comes to realize that of all the attributes you hold, your self-respect is the most precious, and that once you lose it you lose it all. A very serious and bright medical doctor approached me recently with a plan that I had heard others advance on how to avoid the torture of prisoners. He said, "Why not just have the government tell the world that whatever our men say in captivity should not be held against them because they have been instructed to say whatever their captors asked them to say?" Perhaps you have to have been in prison to realize the flaws of such a plan. First of all, it would create practical disciplinary problems within the prisoner community, but secondly, you would be asking men to give up their self-respect. It might not be a problem for the first year or two, but it would start a degenerative process, eating their souls, and that would be a higher price to pay than that of taking torture.

The lessons of the Vietnam prison experience to me were that a man needs to develop a pole star that will guide him. Whereas technology and the use of living comforts are tactics, strategy is morality. To survive under pressure, man needs a strategy that will pass the test of time and taste, and it can't be so shallow as a plan to somehow

achieve “self-realization.” In a high-stress environment, men of wisdom necessarily arise. They are often simple men, but they are always men able to work under trying circumstances with patience. They are necessarily men who can be hated without giving in to the inefficiencies of hating. Men of that type rose to the top and ran our society. This brought to mind the men St. Paul idolized in his letter to the Romans, “[They] rejoice in . . . sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.” They were men with structured value systems, to whom life made sense.

Permissiveness doesn’t work in prison—and in the long haul it doesn’t work in the life on the street. In this connection, I recall Plato’s description of Athens just before its downfall, when all were vying to pander to the passions of the mob. “The teacher fears and flatters his scholars, and the scholars despise their masters and tutors . . . the old do not like to be thought of as morose and authoritative and therefore they imitate the young . . . the citizens chafe impatiently at the least touch of authority, and at length they cease to care even for laws written or unwritten . . . and this is the fair and glorious beginning out of which springs dictatorship.” To repeat my refrain: Life must make sense. People crave order. In a cell you must structure a life of routine and ritual or you become an animal. Education is necessary for survival.

Permissiveness is the glorious beginning out of which springs dictatorship. So also is a lack of moral organization or standards. I remember a story that illustrates this. If a month passed with a prisoner not being called to interrogation for something more purposeful, he was usually given what we called an “attitude check.” One day at a little prison we called Alcatraz, my good friend Jim Mulligan was called in to meet with the interrogator we knew as “Softsoap Fairy.” Softsoap Fairy was intense, bright, and articulate. He was the “nice guy” part of the Mutt and Jeff act—the sort of man assigned to escort American professors “visiting” their friends in Hanoi. Mulligan was pugnacious. After Softsoap had given Jim the usual rundown on the world situation as voiced by the Hanoi newspaper, *Nhan Dan*, and assured him that the Vietnamese people were choosing the path of freedom and righteousness, Mulligan burst forth with his lecture on freedom, including the fact that North Vietnam did not have the vaguest notion of what the word meant. Mulligan pointed out, of course, that everything was programmed, from the interrogator’s questions to the daily newspaper, that it was all under party surveillance. Softsoap, who over the years had learned to accommodate American arguments, lost his cool, sprang to his feet, pounded on the table, and said, “Maybe we don’t have freedoms as you know them in America. Maybe we don’t have the personal options of which you’re so proud. But let me tell you one thing: we do have *order*. For the first time in 4,000 years, this country has order, and we’re glad to have it.”

As Solzhenitsyn says, “Order has limits beyond which it degenerates into tyranny, but freedom is moral only if it keeps within certain bounds, beyond which it degenerates into complacency and licentiousness.” I have suggested that today’s relativist’s moral rules are nothing more than slogans, and moreover that his slogans often contradict each other. A few weeks ago I spent a few days in the company of Tom Landry, coach of the Dallas Cowboys. Although at the meeting we attended, where everybody spoke, there were many Nobel prize winners and other intellectuals of achievement, it seemed to me

and many of the others that Landry laid it on the line as simply and clearly as possible. He said he did not believe in lining his locker room walls with slogans. But he did say that he had a single slogan over the door. It said, "The quality of a man's life is directly proportional to his commitment to excellence." Just another slogan, you say? Perhaps, but I think there is a difference between a slogan which strives to raise good men to a new level of excellence and one which urges them to cruise the depths of egalitarianism, especially at a time when the pejorative "elitist" is often and mistakenly used to denounce advocates of excellence. Perhaps Stewart Alsop was right a few years ago when he wrote, "A great power needs an elite—a group of self-confident, more or less disinterested people, who are accustomed to running things."

I am reminded of a summer lecture series I heard at Stanford about 17 years ago, in which Professor Eric Goldman of Princeton gave his views of the history of American society. His central theme was that, contrary to the popular myth of America being the preserve of the common man, it had in fact been nurtured and inspired by the high and mighty. He said that for its first couple of centuries at least, America had been basically a patrician society. In evidence he read us excerpts from the Groton Prep School speeches of Endicott Peabody to schoolboys like Franklin Roosevelt. Peabody's message was, you boys do not need money. Don't stoop to making it, neither should you stoop to sloth. Your job is to get out and devote your lives to bettering the quality of life in the United States. Run for public office, be a servant of the Republic. If I am not succeeding as the Endicott Peabody of the Naval War College, at least, like him, I am its headmaster, and I am trying to duplicate his high-minded moralism.

I doubt that many of my students are committed to the fads of sloth or relativism, but I'm sure that many are committed to the fads of the sort preached in the better business schools of the country—that is to say, that rational managerial concepts will cure all evils. This viewpoint has its limitations when applied to fighting forces. That's one of the many things Vietnam proved. But a fad is a fad, and you schoolmasters and I, in a sense, have the same problems in common. We are dealing with people who have been weaned to live on slogans, and I believe that we share the need to make our students understand that they need logically consistent rules and principles to live by. They need to develop rules that they can support with logic flowing from, first, a coherent cosmology, an idea of what the world is like, and, second, their idea of the nature of man. Is the world indifferent to man? Aristotle and Spinoza said that God will not step aside to save a good man, but they both felt that there is harmony between man and the universe. Job thought the universe was ruled by a benevolent God. Some think that the universe is hostile to man. What is the nature of man? Is he aggressive, as Hobbes has said? Is he in a hopeless situation, as the existentialists claim?

The important thing, of course, is not that all our charges come to the same conclusions on these issues, but that each thinks out how his particular assumptions on the nature of the universe and man logically lead to his ideas of the proper norms of behavior. What I'm saying is that ethics does not grow in a vacuum. An educated person should be able to extrapolate from concrete realities (facts) and his values (i.e., his needs, goals, likes, and dislikes) logical, consistent, and reliable standards of action. Some will, like Kant, prefer an ethic of acts. Others, as Aristotle and the Stoics preferred, an ethic of

character. Either moralities of acts or moralities of character can be made to work. What is important and instructive, however, is that man—each man—sorts his system out in a consistent manner.

If God desires us to develop ourselves rather than to obey legalistic commands, as those who proclaim the secular age would indicate, let us then consult the champions of self-development, the great classic humanists. Plato, who in his dialogue *Meno* found no evidence that values can be taught per se, did spend his life getting students to reflect on moral excellence and what to expect from a man. From a good cobbler (his favorite analogy), he assumed one could expect good shoes; from a good soldier, skill, courage, and endurance. Another dimension in the study of ethics emerges from Aristotle's famous remark, "The purpose of this present study is not the attainment of theoretical knowledge. We are not conducting this inquiry to know what virtue is, but to become good." That is, in Aristotle's view, the very study of ethics was corrective of human conduct. Epictetus, the ancient Stoic, reflected the same idea in saying, "The first and most necessary topic in the study of ethical philosophy is the practical application of principles." The same idea was recited much later by the English writer John Ruskin: "The purpose of education is not to teach people what they do not know, but to teach them to behave as they do not behave." You can't teach others in a vacuum, and you can't learn moral excellence like cost accounting. You need not only knowledge but experience. Wisdom can't be acquired any other way.

By this time, there may be several of you thinking that I'm the Western military version of Solzhenitsyn and asking where this uncertain, somewhat bleak dialogue is leading. Well, my point is simply this: every man should, through both formal education and tedious thought, commit himself to some philosophy of life, some defined values with which he can proceed confidently each day. From those, he must strive for a congruence of act and character. This is not an easy or enjoyable task, but one which will prepare you for the uncertainties of tomorrow. As educators, we provide the tools and the thoughts of some of history's wise men who have grappled with these questions and answered them. While the technical specifics of method are a concern, they should not dictate an ethical bankruptcy for future generations.

Sentiment rules the world. Socrates knew it, Napoleon said it, and J. F. Kennedy put it to music. I don't think we are in any new age, secular or otherwise. Listen to the words of the late Walter Lippmann: "We have established a system of education in which we insist that while everyone must be educated, yet there is nothing in particular that an educated man must know. . . . This is in itself ominous evidence of what the official historian of Harvard University has called 'the greatest educational crime of the century against American youth,—depriving him of his classical heritage.' . . . The graduates of the modern schools are the actors in the catastrophe which has befallen our civilization." Those words were from his speech to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The date was forty years ago. I think there's enough challenge in that statement for all of us to have a piece of the action. I'm teaching a course in moral philosophy. What are you doing?



## **“Address to the Cadet Wing,” U.S. Air Force Academy, 9 November 1978**

In November 1979, in his second year as President of the Naval War College, Stockdale had just served on a U.S. Navy promotion board. He uses that experience to teach the cadets which qualities board members look for when reviewing military records for officer promotion. He compares these qualities to enduring military virtues that the Greeks deemed essential for warriors: “I think that you should know that by reason or by instinct, most of the boards I’ve sat on have members whose corporate value system—their ‘handbook,’ if I may—is closer to that of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* than to [E. S.] Quade’s *Analysis for Public Decisions*.”

Virtues identified included courage, self-reliance, integrity, emotional stability to handle failure, and leadership. To Stockdale, leadership is “almost synonymous, in my view, with teachership, because every extremely good leader [he had] served with was at his roots a teacher.”



**Source:** Official U.S. Navy photo

## ADDRESS TO THE CADET WING

I, of course, bring experiences to this platform. Experiences with General Winn, Tom Storey, Ben Pollard, Bill Baugh, Jon Reynolds, John Fer, Ted Stier, all in the audience. I also bring thoughts of my moral philosophy course, a course that had its source in the experiences mentioned earlier. But thirdly, I bring a mood tonight, a mood from Washington, which city I left at three o'clock this afternoon, having just completed temporary duties as president of a Navy selection board. My mood is sober, and full of consciousness of the responsibilities I have just exercised. As one goes through those records of officers of 25 or 30 years of service, he gets a history lesson. Seeing the fads and the buzzwords pass before your eyes—fads and buzzwords set down as compliments and now read as dim memories, question marks, and damnation with faint praise—makes one wax philosophical. Whatever happened to “management by objectives” or that good thing, “systems analysis”? But there was enough in those jackets of both the transitory and faddish as well as the permanent and enduring to permit experienced and seasoned board members to look through the former and concentrate on the latter. In the plane coming out I decided to wind my prison experiences and that philosophy course of mine into this selection board scene. I think it will be instructive to you cadets to hear how selection boards in general, and those of the Navy in particular, work. If you're typical of most of us, the information will increase your confidence in the system.

The Navy's layout consists of a board room in which jackets are reviewed and graded by the members themselves, in this case admirals, and an amphitheater where they are portrayed and voted on. We have nicknamed our voting amphitheater “the tank.” The board is, of course, first sworn—left hand on the Bible, right hand raised. Members are sworn to objective impartiality. They are also sworn to confidentiality, so that they can freely discuss personalities and character traits of the candidates. The first act is for the members to sit down and mark with grease pencil the summary sheets of records randomly distributed to them. When the group gets a good stack, they take them into the tank, the marker “briefs” a jacket, and all vote. You should realize that the tank has a series of maybe fifteen or twenty elevated seats viewing a panorama of large projection screens on which pictures, award decorations, fitness report summaries, schools attended, and all are portrayed. At the left of each member's seat is a series of buttons, not lighted and not visible to his neighbor. All the way to the left on this little panel is the button for 100% confidence in the man before the board, second is 75, third is 50,

fourth is 25, and the last one (the fifth from the left, the one on the right) is “no.” It is an interesting psychology lesson to sit there hour after hour and hear these jackets briefed and see how eleven warriors, voting in secret, evaluate the man under consideration. We always ask the man who is briefing the jacket to punch his button first so the rest of us can punch ours at any time while the briefing is going when we feel confident that we can make a good assessment. When the last of the eleven buttons is punched a bell rings and a totalizer portrays the average of all of the votes of those seated. If everybody voted all the way to the left, 100, the totalizer would show 100. If half voted to the left and half voted “no,” it would show 50. It is amusing sometimes to hear the bell ring and [for] the totalizer [to] show low scores in the midst of an impassioned plea of an advocate; and likewise instructive to hear a man being described in very mundane terms, and yet have that indefinable quality about his consistently solid performance that prompts and gets a uniformly high score.

I think that you should know that by reason or by instinct, most of the boards I’ve sat on have members whose corporate value system—their “handbook,” if I may—is closer to that of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* than to Quade’s *Analysis for Public Decisions*. And that’s no bad recommendation. Aristotle, as you know, founded twelve disciplines: physics, psychology, embryology, epistemology, metaphysics, etc.—a good chunk of any university’s catalog. Although time has passed him by in some fields, a recent winner of a Nobel Prize for genetic research said that the award should rightly go to the old master from whose treatise on embryology he lifted some of his prize-winning ideas on sperm chemistry. Skeptics may chuckle about that, but in the area of moral philosophy Aristotle’s preeminence endures. Any scholar who writes an academic article on the subject of ethics is well advised to check the parallel sections of Aristotle’s text, *Nicomachean Ethics*, to make sure that he hasn’t forgotten any contingencies. In the field of military ethics, Aristotle is one of the few writers who actually spells out the qualities that one rightly expects to find in the heart of a warrior, whether a fighting man of the fifth century B.C. or of World War III.

The ancient Greeks, so far as I can tell, are the only responsible scholars to write to warriors about where warriors really live. Aristotle, always practical and methodical, separated virtues into the intellectual category, in which human thought was essential, and the moral virtues, in which human feeling had a part. You could not get too much of an intellectual virtue, but in the moral realm he established the idea of a “mean.” Courage, for instance, he defined as some sort of a mean, between rashness and cowardice. This does not mean that courage is “moderate” rashness or emboldened cowardice. It’s a different sort of thing. Think of Aristotle’s model as a target. The bull’s eye is courage. If one hits to the left, it’s cowardice; to the right, rashness. He further breaks courage down into its components, the principal one being endurance. All Greeks thought of courage and endurance together. That is not to say that they did not admire the single brave thrust or audacious dash; they often did. But their hero was more often the man who “hung in there” when the going got tough. Plato, who was Aristotle’s teacher, called courage a sort of endurance of the soul. (Soul may be a disturbing word to some of you. It appears frequently in philosophy, usually meaning that thing which has a body. It is a widely used word. Arthur Rubinstein, the great pianist, once observed that he had

studied seventeen languages and, although vocabularies differed, all seventeen had a word for soul.) Aristotle said that fear was necessary if courage was to be present. A useful act by a man oblivious to the danger, although appreciated, would not be credited with courage in Aristotle's lexicon. Other considerations: imagination is the mother of fear, courage is really how you handle fear. He has a model man, as did many Greeks. Aristotle called him the Magnanimous Man, an ideal man who handled fear well. He also handled pride well, pride again being the mean between the excess, vaingloriousness, and the defect, self-deprecation. The Magnanimous Man was not the least bit embarrassed about making a true assessment of his own nobility. Furthermore, he was always calm, never evincing surprise. As you read about the Magnanimous Man, your eye sees a George Patton or Billy Mitchell. Never a bureaucrat.

The Greeks defined military qualities. Most of us today can't define them, although we know them when we see them. (Something like the Supreme Court justice who said the same thing of pornography.) Well, I saw plenty of courage in Hanoi. Men who—under years of pressure, solitude, degradation, pain—never took a dive. Baugh with an eye out, Ellis with a leg bone out, Reynolds with two broken arms, Fer in the cold in irons in a cast, Lance Sijan with all the above, unto death. I didn't know what I was seeing, at least I didn't know the name. Plato gave that name, endurance of the soul, courage. Don't you cadets let anybody tell you that courage is outmoded as the prime military virtue, just because we're in a technical society. I want to tell you frankly that nothing rings the bell in the tank like the records of men who know their job is to "fly and fight and don't forget it," when up at bat. I want to talk tonight of four other permanent, enduring military virtues which of course ring bells in the tank. I use the tank as a useful literary accessory, but courage and the four virtues to follow ought to be in a warrior's quiver—just because they *ought*. As Immanuel Kant would say, as part of their "moral law within."

Self-reliance should be there. All warriors like men who are self-reliant, self-disciplined, self-correcting, self-improving—people who do not kid themselves. Their shortcomings are followed in the jackets by self-imposed remedies. They're dynamically regenerative. Of course, this quality was particularly valuable in prison. Those who had it somehow could contain themselves in some sort of moral order while alone. They were stable in isolation, they cultured a ritual in their lives and let their minds prevail in that solitary environment where they came into their own. Somehow they were able to rise above the squalor from an inner direction. Furthermore, they were able to suppress the need for attention from their captors. They were not "players" in that game. They were men who emulated the rugged individualist, their patron saint Ralph Waldo Emerson (who wrote a famous essay of the same name, "Self-Reliance"). In that, he said, "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind." And he maintained his pride even before God: "Prayer as means to effect a private end is meanness and theft." I'm sure there are some in this room who shared my perceptions in prison, coming to the conclusion that praying for personal favors was beneath human dignity. After months of daily prayers alone, we found much more important things to pray for.

Another attribute I would call to your attention is integrity. In the tank, needless to say, those whose records give positive evidence of habitual indirectness or deceit, bomb

out. Most of those eleven voting warriors obviously prefer, in the crunch, loyal plodders to devious geniuses. But integrity is more important than just as a means to get a good score in the tank. With the lack of it comes the emotional baggage of guilt, eating our hearts out. In the intense environment of prison, keeping a clear conscience in an extortion atmosphere was our greatest challenge. We had to work at it. We had to level with our shipmates and say exactly what we had said in the quiz room, not only for tactical reasons but to relieve the pressure of what could become guilt feelings which could tear us up and create the mental depression the communists are trying to obtain. I would say to you that we are all in an extortion environment, particularly those of us in a bureaucracy. It is more insidious out here where there are no bars. Involved are not just junior officers who try to camouflage mistakes but senior officers who wittingly or unwittingly impose requirements that cannot be met and are responded to by white lies and falsified reports. Then the vultures close in, holding your reputation over your head. The monopoly game of the Pentagon is played not with money but with goodwill chits. Once you take up the habit of never quite leveling with associates because you think you can't afford to use your goodwill chits on projects that give you no promise of reciprocity, you find yourself sinking into a savage jungle of intrigue that would arouse the adrenaline in the veins of the mafia. And all the while you're just sitting there at a big mahogany desk.

A third attribute is the emotional stability to handle failure. This is the challenge of education. Handling failure requires historic perspective. There is born in us all some kind of human need to believe there's a moral economy in the universe in which virtue is rewarded and evil is punished. When we suddenly come to the realization that that balance does not exist, we risk coming unglued. Men who cannot accommodate this problem usually accumulate evidence of their naivete in their service record.

The sources of remedy for this crucial human dilemma are usually found in literature. There are sobering sources—the Book of Job. A good man stripped, without apparent reason, of his riches and, most importantly, of his reputation, cries out to God for an explanation, knowing that he did nothing wrong. His friends try to tell him that he must have done something wrong and just doesn't realize it. His wife, even less helpful, suggests that he just “curse God and die.” God grants him that audience he demanded, and in a very sobering scriptural passage says in so many words, “Who are you to challenge me, Job? Where were you when I made this earth? Can you vary the course of the Pleiades? This is my world, Job, and you will either have to get used to it or get out. Shape up or ship out.”

There are humorous examples in literature. *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Solzhenitsyn tells about Ivan, a well-adjusted inmate of a Siberian prison camp whose days are full of the same daily ration of joy, fear, and anxiety found most other places (as we ex-POWs learned to expect). He was joined by the new guy, the naive Navy captain, of course a Soviet political prisoner. The officious, naive newcomer exclaims to the guard: “You have no right to strip us in the cold. You do not understand Article 9 of the Criminal Code.” To which Ivan notes that they had the right and knew the code and thinks to himself of the captain, “You’ve still got a lot to learn, brother.” As the story goes on, throughout this day we see the captain already changing from a “bossy loudmouthed naval officer to a slow-moving, cagey prisoner.”

Then there's the third tragic example in literature: Albert Camus's 1948 Nobel prize-winning novel *The Plague*, where stoic, heroic men trapped in a sealed-off town in northern Africa cope with an epidemic of the horrible bubonic plague. Dr. Rieux, Rambert, and Jean Tarrou work diligently as a self-appointed medical team—a sanitation squad—committed to work in a hopeless cause, knowing there will be no reward. This is obedience to a sense of duty of particularly high form. Both literature and experience tell us that the way of the world is that life is not fair. Educated men must somehow be made to accommodate this; at least they will not then be nagged when misfortune falls with the question, “Why me?”

The fourth attribute is, of course, our old friend leadership. Leadership is almost synonymous, in my view, with teachership, because every extremely good leader I've served with was at his roots a teacher—a teacher who has the wisdom to keep his own philosophical house in order, and moreover to detect philosophical disorder in the minds of his flock. He knows he must wield not only authority but stewardship. That is to say, he cracks the whip, of course, but also he tends the flock. He must have the experience to know that you cannot manage men to their deaths, you must lead them. You must be committed to their tasks and to their welfare. (I was once told that the difference between being committed to something and being involved in something is demonstrated by a plate of ham and eggs. The chicken was involved, but the pig was committed.)

Literature of the nineteenth century, notably that by Dostoevsky, pointed a beacon toward the twentieth century and warned us that men grown restless in the impersonal life of industrialization will not tolerate manipulation. They will not tread through mazes based on the “reasonableness” of carrot-and-stick mentality. As Dostoevsky's Underground Man proclaimed, he would not submit to the “tyranny of reason.” “I am not a piano key”—that is to say, he would not obediently harmonize when stroked. The Vietnamese forgot this. We as prisoners had many and varied motivations for our united resistance. Patriotism for many, religion for many, but I think pride, personal pride, for all. We would not submit to the tyranny of reason. The “reasonable” path down which, by carrot and stick, they tried to lead us step by step to ends of their own advantage, was seen as detestable. Obstinate defiance, sometimes to our short-range disadvantage, was the order of the day. The American Defense intellectuals of the early '60s also forgot this lesson of the early existentialists by trying, through their methods of escalation and measured response, to appeal to the “reason” of a people under siege in an effort to make them behave in a way that was advantageous to us. It didn't work. As old Tony Sokol told me at Stanford, “Those people are economists, they depend on reason, they're going to try to play games with people—and they will get us into trouble.”

You can't lead if you are not totally committed. Michael Walzer, a Harvard philosopher who lectures on legal ethics, has written some essays on disobedience, war, and similar subjects which were popularized in the late 1960s. He even has a section on prisoners of war and their individual rights based on the nineteenth-century international law which would cast them as citizens of the world in benevolent quarantine once captured. Well, those days are gone forever. It's not within the purview of a man in prison to decide whether or not to relay the message from the cell next door, to decide whether

or not to assist in escape. To ignore your prison mate is not your right; it becomes a betrayal. The best book to point this out is not one of those written after our experience but one written nearly 40 years ago, *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler, who describes the prison-wise political prisoners in a Soviet jail in the 1930s. (They had a tap code identical to ours.) The star prisoner was the old Commissar N. S. Rubashov. Once in contact with him, you were in his orbit, as the communists saw it, whether he or you wanted it or not. There was no way to opt out. “Unity over self” was the way we said this in Hanoi. A stock game-theory model of the systems analysts is called the “prisoner’s dilemma.” This hypothetical situation has two prisoners, each guarding a pass through which a massed enemy may come. The logic pattern of the situation is as follows: The best of all worlds for either one of those prisoners is to have the other guy stay while he runs to the rear. The next-best thing is for both of them to stay. The most disadvantageous thing is for both of them to run. The man who thinks that reason controls the world of course concludes that since neither knows what the other is doing, and both know the rational options, both will run. Well, let me tell you, that’s not the way it is. Anybody that’s had any practical leadership knows that a kind of camaraderie occurs when men are under pressure together, and that they will do things irrationally for the benefit of their shipmates.

If these military attributes of courage, self-reliance, integrity, ability to handle failure, and leadership seem to be heavy in emotional content, I say that that’s not far off the mark, as far as our profession goes. It was Napoleon who said, “Sentiment rules the world, and he who leaves it out of his calculation can never hope to lead.”

We need all we can get in the 1980s—all the sentiment, all the technology—because we’ll be in the minority. We’re outnumbered in tanks, we’re outnumbered in airplanes, we’re outnumbered in ships, we’re outnumbered in submarines, we’re outnumbered in men. It’s a heyday for the mathematicians and Lanchester’s Law, which describes the nonlinearity of the disadvantage of being in the minority. I’ve been in the minority with Americans before, and from that experience comes optimism. In all my tactical decisions over those years in prison—tactical decisions that usually came about as the result of purges and the destruction of organizations; decisions about whether to destroy valuable tools, escape materials, and codes to escape compromise—I always made the same mistake. I underestimated the Americans and overestimated the enemy. Those gutty, bright, loyal, inquisitive kids that come from all the best colleges of the land had another communication system and organization going in a third the time I had estimated it would take. Some of the very best came from academies like this. With you, we deserve to be confident of the future.



## **“Commencement Address,” The Citadel, 12 May 1979**

Stockdale gave this address only months before his retirement from the U.S. Navy and subsequent assumption of duties as president of The Citadel. Initially, he mentions his relationship to Col. Oliver James Bond, a former faculty member and superintendent of The Citadel for nearly twenty-three years.

Stockdale goes on to state, “Leadership under pressure will often entail being a moralist, jurist, teacher, steward, and philosopher.” These characteristics of leaders are essential to their success in the future.

He closes with the statement: “Most of us rely on faith when all else fails.” Finally, he reads a poem written by a soldier on a Virginia battlefield during the Civil War in 1865.

# THE CITADEL

## COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

It is with pride that I address you Citadel men—and with pride that I contemplate joining The Citadel family as your President in a few months. I know what has gone on here for 137 years. Every Board of Visitors since 1842 has aimed the curriculum at preparing gentlemen for honorable citizenship in the finest sense of the term. A 17th-century John Milton quotation describes The Citadel's aim: to provide “a complete and generous education[:] that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices [of a citizen], both private and public, of peace and war.” Moreover, I know how academic excellence, order, self-respect, and rigor have been maintained through national conflicts and crises, through vacillations of popular moods, and how more than once the line of self-discipline has been held against a sea of permissiveness beyond these gates. I want to assure you graduates, you undergraduates, you alumni and friends, that I aspire to follow in the footsteps of Coward, Bond, Summerall, and Clark, and those before and subsequent, maintaining the educational and moral philosophy that has kept this school at the top—the finest, toughest all-male military college in America.

This past week I've been doing my evening reading in Colonel Oliver James Bond's story of The Citadel written nearly 50 years ago. (As most of you know, this hall behind me was named for him. He was Class of '86, a faculty member for 22 years, then Superintendent for 23 years, and after that Dean.) I was fascinated by much in the book, including the James Bond part of his name, because, of course, that is part of my name. My genealogy study is not complete, but I am reasonably sure, after reading about his ancestry in the book *History of South Carolina* and studying entries in my Bond family Bible (my mother's family name) that my great-grandfather Walter Bond and Oliver's grandfather Henry Bond were cousins who emigrated from the family settlement in Maryland about 1810. Henry came to South Carolina, we know that from the history. Walter went west and became a farmer. I know that because I own the farm he first carved out of the prairie. So, as I contemplate sitting at my desk inside Bond Hall, I feel at home here at The Citadel already.

I also feel very much at home in your company for other reasons. You seniors have been through an intense experience with men, with classmates, [that] you'll never forget. You've studied together, fought together and against one another, laughed together; if

you were like me in some of my intense experiences, even cried together. You leave this place with more than a diploma. You leave it with what some would call emotional baggage, but what I call a highly developed conscience. It's almost impossible to graduate from an institution like this without it. You've undergone an irreversible process which will never again allow you the comfort of self-satisfaction while being glib or shallow. You will likely forever carry the burdens—and they are burdens—of loyalty, commitment, passion, and idealism. You have undergone an education of the sort people refer to when they say that education is what's left over after you've forgotten all the facts you learned. And that which is left over—that conscience, that sentiment—is indispensable to that capability for which the graduates of this institution are known. And that capability is leadership.

Cool, glib, cerebral, detached guys can get by in positions of authority until the pressure is on. But when the crunch develops, whether in the courtroom, at the negotiating table, in the operating room, or on the battlefield, people cling to those they know they can trust—those who are not detached, *but involved*—those who have consciences, those who can repent, those who do not dodge unpleasantness, yes, those who can mete out just punishment and look their charges in the eye as they do it. When the chips are down, the man with the heart—not the soft heart, not the bleeding [heart], but the Old Testament heart, *the hard heart*—comes into his own, and that's what education in a structured, disciplined environment is all about.

But don't forget, Class of '79, on your graduation day, some of what is structured for you here in the corps of cadets will have to be improvised on a "do it yourself" basis in the new decision-making territory which lies ahead. The Citadel has given you a basic survival kit that will allow you to thrive, but don't be surprised when you find that leadership entails more than professional competence. Leadership under pressure will often entail being a moralist, jurist, teacher, steward, and philosopher.

First the moralist. I define the moralist not as one who mindlessly exhorts men to be good, but one who elucidates what the good is. (Under the press of circumstance this sometimes becomes unclear—as in a prison camp, for instance.) The disciplined life here at The Citadel has encouraged you to be men of integrity committed to a code of conduct, and from these good habits a strength of character and resolve have grown. This is the solid foundation from which you elucidate the good, by your example, your actions, and your proud tradition. A moralist can make conscious what lies unconscious among his followers, lifting them out of their everyday selves into their better selves. The German poet Goethe once said that you limit a man's potential by appealing to what he is; rather you must appeal to what he might be. All great men in history have relied on some measure of ethical resolution in their lives, and it's been perfected in their work and heritage. The Citadel's great men are no exception.

Next, there are times when you'll act as a *jurist*, when the decisions you make will be based solely on your ideas of right and wrong, your knowledge of the people who will be affected, and your strength of conviction. There won't be a textbook or school solution to rely on. I'm not talking about petty legalistic arbitrations or controls, but about hard decisions where you'll be the one with a problem that has seemingly endless complications—when you'll have to think it through on your own. As a jurist, you're writing law,

and that's a weighty responsibility. When in the hot seat, you'll need the courage to withstand the inclination to duck a problem or hand it off; you've got to take it head on.

One word of caution: many of your laws will be unpopular. That's OK. But they should never be unjust. Moreover, you must never cross that fatal line of writing a law that can't be obeyed. (This is a great temptation under pressure—in prison camp we called them “CYA” directives.) Your job as a jurist is to guide others, not to put them in a “Catch-22” position where they are forced to choose between conflicting alternatives. You must be positive and clear and not lapse into a bureaucratic welter of relativism that will have others asking what you *really* mean or trying to respond in the most politically acceptable way.

You elucidate the good as a moralist.

You write the laws as a jurist.

Number three is being a *teacher*. Every great leader I've known has been a great teacher, able to give those around him a sense of perspective and to set the moral, social, and particularly the motivational climate among them. This is not an easy task—it takes wisdom and discipline—you must have the sensitivity to perceive philosophic disarray in your charges and to put things in order. The best starting place for any teacher is to “know yourself,” as I think you seniors probably do.

Here at The Citadel you've followed in the footsteps of greatness. I challenge you to leave those same clear footprints for future generations to follow. In John Ruskin's words, such a process is “painful, continual, and difficult . . . to be done by kindness, by watching, by warning, by precept, and by praise, but above all, by example.” Teachership is indispensable to leadership.

Another test of leadership is that you must be willing to be a *steward*. By that I mean you must tend the flock, even “wash their feet,” as well as crack the whip; you have to be compassionate and realize that all men are not products of the same mold. (They are not all Citadel men out there.) There is much more to stewardship than the carrot-and-stick enticements that some of the vaunted motivational experts would prescribe. It requires knowledge and character and heart to boost others to a tall ship and give them a star to steer her by. The old Civil War historian Douglas Southall Freeman described his formula for stewardship at the Naval War College thirty years ago this month. He said that you had to know your stuff, to be a man, and take care of your men. There are flocks outside these grounds that will require your attention and test your stewardship.

The final test is that you must be able to act as *philosophers* in order to explain and understand the lack of a moral economy in the universe, for many people have a great deal of difficulty with the fact that virtue is not always rewarded and evil punished. To handle tragedy may indeed be the mark of an educated man; for one of the principal goals of education is to prepare us for failure. Stoic philosophy is a crutch. In Hanoi's prisons, when military virtue seemed at the point of irrelevance, I was comforted and strengthened by remembering Epictetus's admonition: “You are but an actor in a drama of such sort as the author chooses—if short, then a short one; if long, then a long one. If it be his pleasure that you should enact a poor man, see that you act it well; or a cripple, or a ruler, or a private citizen. For this is your business—to act well the given part; but

to choose it belongs to another.” My part, in that case, was of course that of a soldier, but the author will have parts for you to play in every profession.

A still better inspiration in times of hopelessness is often history. The Citadel history of 1864–1865 gives the ultimate example of performance of duty with poise and dedication in the face of dismal prospects. The test of character is not “hanging in” when you expect light at the end of the tunnel, but performance of duty and persistence of example when you know no light is coming. Believe me, I’ve been there myself.

Most of us rely on faith when all else fails. Perhaps we can all benefit from a little-known relic, a poem left on a Virginia battlefield in 1865. A soldier had written:

I asked for strength that I might achieve  
 God made me weak that I might obey  
 I asked for health that I might do greater things  
 He gave me infirmity that I might do better things  
 I asked for riches that I might be happy  
 I was given poverty that I might be wise  
 I asked for power that I might have the praise of men  
 I was given weakness that I might feel the need for God  
 I asked for all things that I might enjoy life  
 I was given life that I might enjoy all things  
 I received nothing that I asked for  
 All that I hoped for  
 And my prayer was answered. I am most blessed.

Men of The Citadel, Class of 1979, may you all be blessed.



## **“The ‘Melting’ Experience: Grow or Die,” 24 May 1981**

In this commencement address delivered at John Carroll University, Stockdale warns the graduates, “Pressurized experiences have a way of giving us an overload of dilemmas that can’t wait for a waffled solution.” Pressure makes the lessons more focused and easier to remember—almost like a “creative transformation” of “changing . . . base metals into precious ones.”

He highlights that prisons have been harsh but formative places of learning throughout history. “Like most pressure chambers, they seem to draw out the very best and the very worst in mankind.” Stockdale discusses his solitary confinement experience and how it was easy for him to focus on problems without all the noise or “yackety yack” that Americans experience in their daily lives.

“You are your brother’s keeper” was a reminder and mantra that Stockdale often used when facing an ethical dilemma in prison. The bond among prisoners was unique: “To ignore your fellow man in the pressure chamber is to betray him.” Stockdale highlights many of the reasons for this relationship, and explains the importance of fellow prisoners in one’s perseverance during extreme adversity—“The Man Next Door” is what helps you to keep going. Stockdale concludes this powerful address with an anonymous prayer.

In 1995, a variation of this manuscript was published in Stockdale’s book *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*.

# THE “MELTING” EXPERIENCE

## Grow or Die

Your President and I have a mutual friend, a Boston thoracic surgeon who has a great sensitivity for issues concerning the meaning of life and the nature of man. It's easy to understand how a man who spends the best part of his busy days at the pressure-packed juncture of life and death could become absorbed in philosophical thought. But this medical doctor doesn't let it go at that. He refines his thoughts through reading and shares the best of his findings of high-quality professional articles—those bearing on the human predicament in general and human ethics in particular—with Father O'Malley, and me, and a few others. Well, all this bears on how I'm going to spend the next 15 minutes, because it follows that any of us in the Doctor Eugene Laforet network could expect our colleagues to have some pretty strong notions about ethical systems and their formulation. And sure enough, Father O'Malley—shall we say—“strongly suggested” that I expose some of mine today.

Pressurized experiences have a way of giving us an overload of dilemmas that can't wait for a waffled solution. One seems to be continually in the position described by Dr. Alfred North Whitehead, of not being able to bring half an umbrella to work just because the weather man says there's a 50% chance of rain. When Dr. Eugene Laforet gets a person's chest opened up, he has to cut here or cut there in a finite interval of time. He can't waffle it. Students at John Carroll University have to take the scheduled exam and pass or flunk, ready or not. Life seems to become compressed, running ahead, as if being watched on a movie screen—with the projector set on “high speed rewind.”

But in these circumstances, as your attention is channeled, as you concentrate, you can sometimes sense that you're undergoing a “melting” experience. Some of your inhibitions and pre-set feelings, fears, and biases “melt” as you come to realize that, under the gun, you must grow or fail—in some cases, grow or die. A sort of transformation takes place under pressure . . . under what the alchemists of the Middle Ages called the “hermetic.”

The “hermetic” idea is old, and had come down from ancient Greece and Egypt, and was colored by Christian sacramental teaching. It was a twofold concept. It meant

something sealed off—hermetically sealed, as we say. And it also meant magic—particularly magical transformation. You put something in a crucible or a retort and you subjected it to certain pressures like heat or doses of sulfur or mercury. If you were lucky or wise or both, some kind of creative transformation would take place. In physical terms, this referred to the changing of base metals into precious ones—lead into gold. But the top-grade alchemical philosophers were not content with mere physical crucibles and crystal retorts you could hold in your hand. They were aiming at even more important things. Paracelsus thought it might be possible to create a human being (homunculus) in the laboratory—something today people are again getting uneasy about. The higher alchemy aimed not at mere physical change but at moral and spiritual transformation. The crucible and retort became symbols of creative growth. Fire and the twin elements sulfur and mercury came to represent the outside pressures exerted upon the human soul in its confined place. In extreme cases, the fire might be of hellish origin. But if the soul in question were strong enough, not mere passive matter, that spirit might undergo an alchemical change—a metamorphosis of the spirit in which the ordinary stuff of humanity could turn into something precious, emerging as if from a tightly sealed cocoon.

This alchemy comparison may sound far-fetched, but it contains a hint of the sort of process of intellectual and even spiritual transformation I'm going to talk about today. A person's ethical notions tend to crystalize in the "hermetic." Mine did. The pressure chamber in which my most deeply felt ideas were forged was not a surgical operating room, not a pressure-packed classroom, but a prison cell.

Prisons have been crucibles of both degradation and creative impulse throughout history. Like most pressure chambers, they seem to draw out the very best and the very worst in mankind. Writers have attributed prison inspiration to Boethius, Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn, and dozens of other ex-convicts who later made their mark in the world. But in many cases, the main inspiration was obtained through reflection, through the opportunity their prison experience provided them for uninterrupted thought, time for them to reorder their lives while languishing.

I have had periods of more or less stress-free imprisonment, even in solitary confinement. A fellow prisoner, a math scholar, once did me the tremendous favor of passing to me (and I mean by that, putting it through the concrete wall between us with our tap code, as I memorized it) an arithmetic formula of expansion that—in a remarkably few iterations of such simple form that they could be performed with a stick in the dust—would yield natural logarithms to three or four decimal places. After weeks of thought, I reconstructed the process of going from natural logarithms to logs of base ten. I slowly became the world's greatest expert on the exponential curve; I dusted off the construction of a log log duplex deci-trig slide rule in my head (no pencils or papers allowed in the cell—my log tables had to be etched with a nail on the concealed side of a bed board). I became one of the few men alive to truly understand why any number raised to the zero power necessarily had to be unity, why zero factorially is unity, and so on. I spent months and months in deep concentration, and at one point could have written a pretty good advanced mathematics text. I knew the logarithmic-exponential picture inside out.

You might find it interesting that after I'd been home about two weeks I was so struck with disillusionment at the contents of a freshly received letter that I almost cried. It was just a short letter from my young son's prep school math teacher with a casual request for a brief written summary of all it took to build a slide rule in prison. He obviously had devoted very little reflection to the comprehensiveness of mathematical development entailed. I chose not to do it, and I hope you can understand my frustrated dismay with the commonplace insensitivity of this big easy "world of yackety yack," as I sometimes maliciously thought of it those first weeks out. More about disillusionment later.

Those stress-free prison experiences occurred only late in the game—only after the North Vietnamese ceased trying to extort propaganda and other material from us (a heaven-sent reprieve which took effect only after President Nixon came into office and reversed the previous administration's misguided policy of keeping known instances of communist brutality against American prisoners secret from the American press). My mathematical thoughts came from the stress-free period; the ethical thoughts came from the period when the pressure was on—extortive pressure, torture pressure, pressure to the limit to get us to contribute to what turned out to be their winning propaganda campaign beamed at the American man on the street, pressure to the limit to get us to inform on one another. These last two ideas were tied together as integral parts of the extortion system.

I'm not here to tell war stories today, but I must give you just a little more descriptive information if I'm to get across what I mean by the melting experience. The central strategy of the extortion system involved not only the imposition of loneliness, but of fear and guilt—fear of pain, and guilt at having betrayed your fellow. We were all in solitary confinement and [were] solemnly warned that any attempt to communicate with fellow Americans—by wall tap, by signal, by whisper, you name it—would be evidence of our ingratitude for "the humane and lenient treatment of Ho Chi Minh." The rules of the game were that such "ingratitude" gave the North Vietnamese the moral justification for pommeling the communicator, while his arms were simultaneously squeezed with tourniquets, shutting off the blood circulation until he "submitted." Their system was designed to produce the propaganda and information they wanted, whether the American chose either of the two obvious ways to go: to stay off the prisoner communication tap code network—and eventually become so depressed after a couple of years that he would presumably be willing to "buy" human contact at the price of collaboration with the enemy—or to join the American communication network—that is to say, to join the American covert civilization, get caught communicating as one eventually did from time to time, and then be put through the standard chain of events. That chain went from torture to submission to confession to apology to atonement. The atonement was of course to be the giving away of prisoner secrets—being an informer, in other words—plus the writing of the old propaganda statement about how you had been guilty of bombing "churches, schools, and pagodas." In theory, at least, we were in a no-win situation.

I think that's enough background to show that we were in a pressurized quagmire of ethical dilemmas. People were trying to use us and have us tear each other up in the process. From this cauldron were extruded some basic ethical guideposts.

Now, Father O'Malley asked that I talk about ethical notions of the sort that would qualify as growing within a person's interior self, and not simply a set of "lessons learned" from without. Be assured that I'm not just building up a set of guideposts for prison, or for a more general military setting. My conclusions are infinitely general. From this eight-year experience I distilled one all-purpose idea, plus a few corollaries. It is a simple idea, an idea as old as the scriptures, an idea that is the epitome of high-mindedness, an idea that naturally and spontaneously comes to men under pressure. If the pressure is intense enough or of long enough duration, this idea spreads without the need even for its enunciation. It just takes root naturally. It is an idea that in this big, easy world of yackety yack seems to violate the rules of game theory, if not of reason. It violates the ideas of Adam Smith's invisible hand, our ideas of human nature, and probably the second law of thermodynamics. That idea is: "You Are Your Brother's Keeper."

That's the flip side of "What's in it for me?" If you recognize the first as an expression of virtue and the second as an expression of vice—as I'm sure any student of Father O'Malley would recognize them—let Bacon's distinction add relevance to my concentration on adversity on this graduation day of joy: "Adversity doth best induce virtue . . . While luxury doth best induce vice."

I need to tell you that it soon became clear that the only way to go—for peace of mind, for mental health, if you will, as well as for practicality—was to forget that business about lying low and staying out of trouble by not communicating. Everybody had to get on the line and expect frequent torture after being caught, because we had a civilization to build: a civilization of Americans behind walls, a civilization of political autonomy that would rule itself with its own laws with almost no contact with the parent country or its government in Washington for eight years. (Thank God.)

When I started teaching philosophy at the Naval War College about four years ago, I commenced reading the philosophical literature of the Vietnam era and came across a startling essay about prisoner of war ethics by Harvard Professor Michael Walzer. One of the major flaws of this piece—written about 1970, three years before I was released—was the recurring theme of individual rights and how the individual prisoner had no obligation to bother with cooperating with fellow prisoners in a clandestine organization because the poor incarcerated soul had enough to do in following the orders of the captors. He couldn't have been more wrong. To ignore your fellow man in the pressure chamber is to betray him. Anybody who has been there knows that your neighbor in the cell block becomes the most precious thing on earth. I'll try to explain some of the reasons why.

When you're alone and afraid and you feel your culture is slipping away from you, and even though you're hanging on to your memories—memories of language, of poetry, of prayers, of mathematics—hanging on with your fingernails as best you can, and yet in spite of all your efforts you still see the bottom of the barrel coming up to meet you and you realize how thin and fragile our veneer of culture is, when you suddenly realize the truth that we all can become animals when cast adrift and tormented for a mere matter of months or seasons, you start having some very warm thoughts about the only life preserver within reach: that human mind, that human heart next door. You become unashamed to say what you mean when your pal is being taken out for torture for being

caught trying to get a message to you. You tap "God Bless You, Jerry," or perhaps "I Love You, Jerry."

Man's need for his fellows was certainly spotlighted in those exaggerated circumstances. We were able to defy what is often billed as the natural selfishness of man, even the survival instinct of man, by sticking to the spirit of ideas like "Unity over Self" and other axioms of our organization. The sting of guilt was taken out of the program by the commonsense expedient of never keeping secrets from other Americans. No matter what we said or were forced to say under torture in the privacy of the interrogation room, we routinely put out the details on our tap code net. This was a natural for tactical defense and expediency, but it was a hidden pearl for the expiation of guilt feelings. We learned that the virtues of truthfulness and straightforwardness have their own reward.

But there was more to this being your brother's keeper than being rewarded in a practical sense. J. Glenn Gray, a professor of philosophy at Colorado College until his death in 1977, wrote of that special power of comradeship to overcome man's alleged basic instinct of self-preservation. He made his observations as a foot soldier on the European battlefields of WWII and recorded them in one of his books, *The Warriors*. I was at a convocation at Colorado College (where three of my sons have gone) when their President introduced me to this man and his literature by remarking that Professor Gray was the only serious scholar of recent times to reflect deeply on how men behave in mutually shared danger, mutually shared pressure. His book, and my conversations with him the year before he died, corroborated what I saw in Hanoi. Glenn Gray wrote:

Numberless soldiers have died, more or less willingly, not for country or honor or religious faith or for any other abstract good, but because they realized that by fleeing their post and rescuing themselves, they would expose their companions to greater danger. Such loyalty to the group is the essence of fighting morale. The commander who can preserve and strengthen it knows that all other psychological or physical factors are little in comparison. The feeling of loyalty, it is clear, is the result, and not the cause, of comradeship. Comrades are loyal to each other spontaneously and without any need for reasons. Men may learn to be loyal out of fear or from rational conviction, loyal even to those they dislike.

(Glenn Gray contrasts comradeship with friendship)

Friendship is not just a more intense form of comradeship but its very opposite. "While comradeship wants to break down the walls of self, friendship seeks to expand these walls and keep them intact. The one relationship is ecstatic, the other is wholly individual." . . .

. . . Nothing is clearer than that men can act contrary to the alleged basic instinct of self-preservation and against all motives of self-interest and egoism. Were it not so, the history of warfare in our civilization would be completely different from what it has been.

The question is sometimes asked of those who have been for long periods in high-stress situations, “What kept you going?” “What was your highest value?” My answer is: The Man Next Door.

What about corollaries to this single, simple, old-fashioned idea?

First, let’s talk about very recent history. How does what I’ve said track with the way we Americans handled the matter of the hostages in Iran? Did we credit them with that nobility of spirit, that pride of autonomy and self-reliance that generates within a body of people of good will, united in a common cause under pressure?

I don’t think we gave them a chance to generate that spirit. We played with them like rag dolls. We couldn’t keep our hands off them, allowing do-gooders to parade them before TV cameras, arranging for and executing piecemeal destabilizing early releases (President Carter worked to secure through Yasir Arafat of the PLO the parole of United States Marines in the first weeks of the affair—Marines whose duty it was to remain with their legation in accordance with the Code of Conduct), in general fostering the idea that the captive legation staff was not a proud autonomous band but a bunch of pitiable lost sheep—children stranded at the bus station waiting for a parent to come down and take them home.

Americans don’t seem to be able to grasp the politics and psychology of terrorism and hostage taking. Here’s a chance for this class of 1981 to get in on the ground floor. After the pope was shot, the papers were full of thoughtful reflections and predictions by informed people. Their message, class of ’81, was that your age will be the age of terrorism and hostage taking.

A better explanation of my thoughts on this recent hostage issue was in the Sunday *Washington Post* on January 25th, the day the main body of the hostages arrived back in the United States. I entitled my article “Extortionist Theatre.” I see this whole scene as a modern art form—a vile art but, like most arts, fed and supported by their audience. Of course, actors are needed, too. In the recent show, America furnished both the actors and the audience. The hostages were on camera, our squeamish president was publicly agonizing and assuring the world and the Iranians that no damage would be inflicted on the theater, and the American man on the street demanded and got his daily dose of several hours of hostage soap opera. To any outlaw group or government with that natural bent for extortion, this whole scene spelled one thing: Gold Mine!!! “Just swoop in and grab a dozen Americans, get the show in the news, get the hands wringing and the tears flowing, and you can write your own ticket.” Some countries know how to stop this. If you’re interested, check with Israel.

A second corollary could also become a public policy issue. How does what I’ve said track with the well-intentioned suggestion I sometimes hear, the one that goes something like this: “You military prisoners went through hell—trying to protect information that wasn’t worth it—and by refusing to make statements against your government which were no worse than those Senator Fulbright was making. Let’s get smart. Forget the Code of Conduct. Tell the world we’ve instructed our prisoners to say or write anything they’re asked to say or write. That way we would defuse the whole situation.”

Let me tell you that the enemy extortionists would really like that system. With resistance brushed aside, they would just dig deeper and play even more lethal games with

guilt. Don't kid yourself into thinking they're going to start with an antiwar statement in a candy store like that. More likely subjects for their first assigned prisoner essays would be matters like: "Why I know that capitalism made my mother a whore," or "Why I believe it is every prisoner's duty to inform on his fellow Americans." In a prison civilization, even a covert one, a person's most prized possession is his reputation with his peers. Right off the bat, dissension would dominate the scene because a lot of, if not most, people will just not stoop to self-imposed degradation. They will refuse to write anything. Who's going to order them to follow this proposed new U.S. Government policy? Are you going to ask the senior prisoner to do that? You would never get me to do that. You can't get out of this predicament by making it optional, either. This oft-heard proposal has an inherent logic that drives toward destructive guilt feelings and disunity. Togetherness would go, self-respect would go, and the prison civilization would become an animal farm. It has been said that you can't legislate morality; you can't legislate degradation either. My message on this corollary is: "You can't make a good man under pressure finesse evil, no matter how 'smart' it seems."

A third corollary also focuses on conventional "smartness." How does what I've said track with this fact, which I generally believe to be the truth: Well-applied torture can eventually make any man give up particular facts that the interrogating ghoul knows he knows. When confronted with this, the "smart money" guys from the big, easy world of yackety yack might say: "When you know your enemy is on a winning wicket, why resist?" "It defies common sense to resist—save your strength for something important." "Don't fight City Hall."

My point is that people of good will, under pressure, united in a common cause do fight City Hall. Thank God. When the cool, rational, "smart money" skeptics challenge the united sacrifice in this example, several answers are possible.

A practical answer: "It's the only way to go in an extortion environment—everybody make 'em hurt him. The ghouls don't like to have to hurt everybody. They don't like to be reminded of our unity. Furthermore, when you see how frustrated it makes 'em, it makes you like to live with yourself."

An Aristotelian answer: "Man is not a package of on-off switches; he is not at his base some sort of binary computer. Compulsion and free will can coexist. To give up just because you know you can't achieve total success is a form of determinism. I don't subscribe to environmental, genetic, or any simplistic determinism. Will is the thing. Man makes his character here on earth. I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul."

My answer: Loyalty to the group. I have a reputation to uphold with them. I can't let them down. They are my country. They are my family. I'm not a kid stranded in the bus station trying to minimize the pain while I wait for my mother country to come and pick me up.

Finally, one corollary that falls out of that ecstatic relationship that comes as a surprise to most of us. I'm picking up on that suggestion that I would have more to say about disillusionment. I'm going to talk about how easy it is for a well-intentioned person to commit a cruelty of disillusionment under pressure.

It's important here to interject the fact that we in those prisons were not an unsophisticated group. We were almost all fighter pilots, all had bachelor's degrees, and more than

half of us had at least one advanced degree. At least most were sophisticated enough to know that as intelligent people we should be able to cope with tentativeness and commitment at the same time—much as Aristotle would have us cope with the ideas of free will and compulsion at the same time. What I’m saying is that by and large we were able to accommodate commitment unto death and freedom of thought at the same time. Political or religious orthodoxy were not requirements for joining the club. But I think we all tacitly agreed that insensitivity and lack of restraint in the expression of destabilizing personal views to others was very poor form.

Nevertheless, I saw cruelty of disillusionment kill a depressed and thoughtful man. You would never guess how. It was not messages of gloom but cheery messages of hope, persistently drummed into him month after month, that eventually did him in. He internalized and took seriously those “sure fire” upcoming release dates. After a number had uneventfully passed us by, his mind drifted away, he got so he couldn’t hold his rice down, and he died of a broken heart.

After I returned, I later found that there are many examples of that in the literature. Some of you may have read the book *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, veteran of the Holocaust and a psychologist and lecturer. He says that the big threats to morale in the crucible are not the pessimists but the incurable vocal and persistent optimists. That being so, think how much damage, more damage, gratuitous statements of political or religious dissent could do to people close to the wire. It is easy to forget that, in this age of free speech at any cost.

That was not forgotten in Hanoi, probably because we were all so close to one wire or another, and so determined—spontaneously determined, ecstatically determined—to prevail, to see each other through, with love, together.

We asked for strength that we might achieve  
 God made us weak that we might obey  
 We asked for health that we might do great things  
 He gave us infirmity that we might do better things  
 We asked for riches that we might be happy  
 We were given poverty that we might be wise  
 We asked for power that we might have the praise of men  
 We were given weakness that we might feel the need of God  
 We asked for all things that we might enjoy life  
 We were given life that we might enjoy all things  
 We received nothing that we asked for—all that we hoped for  
 And our prayers were answered.  
 We were most blessed. (anonymous prayer)

John Carroll University, class of 1981, may you all be blessed.



## **“Finley Lecture,” Knox College, 25 February 1985**

Stockdale felt indebted to Knox College, a nationally ranked liberal arts college in Galesburg, Illinois, that he had attended before the U.S. Naval Academy. He acknowledges “debts to Knox County as it was when I grew up in it, debts to this town and Knox College for the sense of history they brought to me, and debts to the memory of those I loved here, those who raised me.”

In 1985, Stockdale taught a philosophy course at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution titled *Moral Dilemmas of War and Peace*. In the present lecture, he draws on some of the same ideas that he discussed in his Stanford class, including those of Epictetus and other Stoics; the guilt he felt after being tortured; and the communications tap code used between prisoners of war (POWs). Of his POW experience, Stockdale says, “What I have described is the most elaborate laboratory a student of human nature could hope for.”

For this college audience, Stockdale emphasizes the value of liberal arts: “You couldn’t build an underground society in hostile territory with just an engineering education. It is only possible with an education in the liberal arts—the kind of education given here [at Knox College].”

## KNOX COLLEGE FINLEY LECTURE

President McCall, it is a distinct honor for me to be called back to Knox County, to Knox College, to give the annual Finley Lecture. I am in prestigious company, and I'm different than most of your past speakers in at least a couple of ways. First, whereas most of my predecessors had the distinction of having an eye for a social need, and then met that need with a lifetime of work and ultimate achievement, I took the lot that was handed to me and made the best of it. Chance dropped me in my 40s into a life I could never have foreseen: . . . a peculiar war halfway around the world . . . aerial combat . . . eight years of imprisonment in a *political* prison [where people are *used*]\* . . . and ultimately to serve as head of government of an autonomous colony of American pilots, almost out of contact with home.

I'm different than past Finley Lecturers in a second way as well: in my early 60s I return to the place of my birth to talk about the decade of my 40s with a deeply felt obligation of "having debts to pay." I mean debts to Knox County as it was when I grew up in it, debts to this town and Knox College for the sense of history they brought to me, and debts to the memory of those I loved here, those who raised me. For here in these parts I received the very best preparation I could have had for what befell me. Here I learned:

- who I was, and who I was not,
- where I began and where I left off, and
- how to say "no," effortlessly.

Last fall, my wife, Sybil, and I brought out our memoirs of that decade of our 40s, in *In Love and War*. Our publisher, Ed Burlingame of Harper and Row, asked us to include in the early chapters enough of our upbringing to give the reader a hint as to "where we began and where we left off," a basis for understanding how we were to act in unforeseen crises. I had lived a life full of experiences that build stereotypical images in alien minds: Naval Academy, fighter pilot, carrier pilot, test pilot. As I spent weeks of reflection trying to dredge up the bedrock connections between my past and how I met later challenges, I realized that "where I began and where I left off" was all set and in place long before I

\*Brackets original.—Eds.

donned a uniform. Who I was and who I was not, the center of gravity of my emotional baggage, was all established by the time I was “that” high, here in Knox County.

I’ll speak more of the nature of that “center of gravity” of my emotional baggage as I spin *not* what I intend to be a tale of agony, but a tale of hope and confidence in the power of the human spirit—in particular, renewed confidence in the power of those human spirits who have the good fortune to be liberally educated in the sense it is meant here at Knox College.

I left Knox County 42 years ago as a 19-year-old kid, who had grown up in Abingdon and spent a lot of time on our nearby farm, “Rolling View.” I went to Knox College for a while, Monmouth College for a while, and left for Annapolis and the Navy as the fulfillment of my lifelong dream. I have since made several visits back here, of course, but my first real “Return,” with a capital “R”—not because of its duration, but because of the *double impact* of the occasion—occurred 21 years ago, in 1964, coincidentally 21 years after I had left for Annapolis. (The math goes like this: 19 years old when I left, 21 years to the Return, 21 years to now, equals 61 years, my age tonight.)

One impact of that Return was its mission—to go to the bedside of my dying father. It involved a trip of twelve thousand miles from the Western Pacific, from a little patch of ocean just south of the Tonkin Gulf called Yankee Station (whose name was then just evolving). You get the flavor of my “having debts to pay,” of the nature of the center of gravity of my emotional baggage, from part of the description of that flying trip home in our book:

I saw this voyage home as more than just the duty of a loving son. . . . [T]o me this trip marked the end of an era in my life, a pilgrimage to my birthplace. It was there that I had taken on a driving sense of obligation, and become permanently encumbered with all that valuable emotional baggage that made me a conscientious but self-governing fighter pilot. I figured it was healthy to be reminded of my upbringing and who I was from time to time; I would take all those qualities I acquired in my boyhood home with me to the grave.

The very air I breathed around here—on Main Street, Middle America, prewar 1930s—whispered: “You have debts to pay.” Throughout the book, I find myself talking of obligation, nagging doubts, guilt. One time a few years later in prison, half out of my head from torture and starvation, I hear myself saying as evening shadows fell, “and you’ve not even practiced your piano today.” What I am saying tonight is: “Thank you, boyhood home, for that guilt, for those imaginary debts.”

Notice that I’m not giving thanks for conventional assets; many think “emotional baggage” a detriment, a trouble-making liability. I was shot down and imprisoned only a year after this trip home, which was only a couple of years after I had finished a couple of years of grad school at Stanford, mostly in a philosophy program—and the two books from that program that came most often to mind in the dungeons of Hanoi were both by Arthur Koestler: *Darkness at Noon* and its sequel, *Arrival and Departure*. The main character in the latter (an escapee from both Nazi and communist prisons) is wounded, exhausted, and lying low in neutral Portugal in 1940. A friendly female psychotherapist,

also a refugee from Southeast Europe, who wants him to flee with her to the safety of America, has just completed, by her psychotherapy, a “spring cleaning” of his emotional-baggage-laden mind, which is obsessed with the idea of his returning to the war. (“Why?” his friends were asking; “It makes no sense”; “He’s done his part”; “What’s eating him?”) Just when she thinks she has him on the boat, ready to sail to a happy life in America, he reverses his field and accepts a British offer to parachute him behind enemy lines as a spy. As he leaves for the airport, Arthur Koestler has him say:

The prosperity of the race is based on those who pay imaginary debts. Tear out the roots of their guilt and nothing will remain but the drifting sands of the desert.

Like, what’s so great about emotional tranquility? What’s so great about a happy childhood? I grew up learning why to *not* just let the sands drift where the winds of chance take them—that the luck of the draw is no excuse for failure. I hasten to add that I was not nagged as a child; these ideas were never articulated in words so much as by example; they sort of came from the air I breathed.

(p. 288, *ILAW\**): Somewhere along the way, that awful drive, that tough-minded determination never to be put down, developed within me. You just couldn’t grow up in that house in that little town, with all of that personal attention from proud parents, all that embarrassment, and all those big dreams, and not get the feeling you had a continual obligation to push yourself to the limit.

Some of you may have read my account in the same book of *my* “Arrival and Departure,” that same early autumn trip to my Dad’s deathbed on a brief respite from the preliminary battles of Vietnam in that summer of 1964. It was at 6:30 on the morning of the 9th of September that I, the only passenger to get off in Galesburg from the overnight CB&Q train from Omaha, walked through these lonely streets to St. Mary’s Hospital, briefly visited my unconscious father’s room, and, in need of air and choked up by what I had perceived as the certainty of his imminent death, and suddenly (and this is the *second impact*) further choked up by my private knowledge of the certainty of imminent full-scale war for this country, in which many others would surely die—perhaps me too—I walked down the hospital steps and into the morning sun, for a talk with the only other person in sight, one who would understand better than most what I was up against: Mother Bickerdyke, the Civil War nurse.

A month after the South Carolina militia had opened fire on Fort Sumter in April 1861, Mother Bickerdyke of Galesburg, a 44-year-old widow of two years, mother of two young sons, doing work as a practical nurse (“botanic physician,” her biographer of 1886 calls her) to make ends meet, was watching 500 Galesburg boys march off as volunteers in response to new President Lincoln’s call for a total of 75,000 troops nationwide for three months’ service to “suppress the insurrection.” Trouble with South Carolina had been brewing for months, and the Fort Sumter incident had not yet rattled the rafters of

\**In Love and War*.—Eds.

the nation—Lincoln's small, short-time callup gave the impression it was just a transient flap, not the "real thing."

And as I stood before Mother Bickerdyke's bronze likeness on the courthouse lawn on that morning of September 9th, 1964, it was similarly a month after a transient flap, in the lull before the storm of full-scale war. As perhaps she felt in Galesburg in May of 1861, I *knew* in Galesburg in September 1964 that a war was already "functionally" declared and that we were in just another "post-Fort Sumter lull." On the 5th of August, a month before, I had led, as their squadron commander, a horde of carrier planes on the American air strike (in reprisal against the Tonkin Gulf incident of the night of the 4th) against the North Vietnamese gasoline tank farm, on the mainland of Asia, in the city of Vinh (44,000 people).

(*ILAW*,\* p. 32): I sashayed right with a quick deep wing dip for a peek toward the tanks and—my God!—I couldn't believe the fire! . . . In that split second, a great truth was revealed to me: In the last ten seconds, America had just been locked into the Vietnam War. No question about it; as of *right now*, all other options were now closed. And the rest of those big Spad TNT bombs were still falling in a column, 28,000 pounds of them, and all going right down inside that fenced enclosure.

Of course, like Fort Sumter, something like the Tonkin Gulf (which historian Barbara Tuchman now calls no less significant) was more or less inevitable sooner or later. Both occurred in the middle of tinderbox situations. But to me that week had been particularly gripping because I knew the reprisal I led had been ordered under false pretenses. (I had thereby become, whether I liked it or not, a primary source for American historians.) Our destroyers only thought for a while they had been under attack the night before, and followup messages from their commander and from me, commander of the air cover, saying "false alarm" had been read in Washington twelve hours before they ordered our attack anyway. A bad omen; but little did I know that after a coming twelve months of combat flying, and one year *to the day* after my "conversation" with Mother Bickerdyke, I would be shot down in North Vietnam and be protecting that secret with my life.

The buildup into full-scale war had been exciting for Mother Bickerdyke, too. By midsummer 1861, corpses had started arriving back in Galesburg; her minister, Dr. Edward Beecher of the brick Congregational Church (later known here as Beecher Chapel), had read aloud during a service a letter from Cairo, Illinois, describing the widespread illness of the Union soldiers there, and after depositing her boys with neighbors, off she went to war as a volunteer nurse. She didn't get home to stay for five years, and her involvement was intense. At Cairo she went to work for the local commander, a new Colonel Ulysses Grant of Galena, Illinois. She went on with him to Belmont, Missouri; Fort Henry and Fort Donelson in Tennessee; Vicksburg, Mississippi; and back to Chattanooga; then joined the *second*-best Union General at Missionary Ridge, and went with him to Atlanta, and on the way home found herself in charge of rehabilitating the Union prisoners William Tecumseh Sherman (that second-best general) had broken out of the prisons in Beaufort and Florence, South Carolina.

\**In Love and War*.—Eds.

Why all this Bickerdyke? Because she symbolizes to me my *grandparents'* generation (all four of them were in Knox County, as young people of course, when she and her husband moved to Galesburg in 1856). I owe them, their generation, this town, this campus, a debt for what I drew from them in *my* war. First, a romantic sense of history and self-sacrifice. Bickerdyke saw the fur fly for four years, and her quotations reveal a little of that "zest for conflict" that I could not have survived without. After watching the goings on at Fort Donelson in February, 1862, she wrote:

From where I stood I could see the 6th Wisconsin, the Chicago Light Infantry, and all the big siege guns. In quick succession flashed from their black mouths broad sheets of flame and smoke which obscured the view, while the air seemed to quake with the rolling peal that followed. . . . The infantry were all a mass of lines . . . ; and between the roar of cannonading, their ringing cheers and shouts could be heard with the sharp rattle of musketry.

Such puts you in mind of Robert E. Lee's remark after he viewed a similar sight: "It is well that war is so terrible, else we would grow too fond of it."

(At Stanford, I teach Moral Dilemmas of War and Peace, Philosophy 76—I lecture on the moral dilemmas of self-sacrifice. As you know, according to many of the Christian saints, self-sacrifice is the highest virtue. The battlefield comes up a lot in my lectures; ironically, it is one of the few places on earth where this highest virtue can be unambiguously and readily exercised.)

And also I thank Mother Bickerdyke's and my ancestors' generation, the one which broke out this black soil that's all around us, for that innate love of this land that stayed with me. My first winter in prison was tough. I was crippled, cold, sick at heart as I grudgingly gave ground as torture guards strangled my blood circulation till I submitted.

(*ILAW*,\* p. 176): On those endless cloudy days of that clammy winter [of 1966], I would crutch myself back and forth across the length of New Guy Village cell 3 and imagine a return to America that would disgrace my family, my hometown, and my service. The nightmare always came to an end with my turning my back on society and eking out a living on Rolling View Farm [the farm of one pair of those grandparents who were in Knox County with Mother Bickerdyke]—the one thing the Vietnamese could not rob me of. That farm of mom's saved my life that winter.

I was lucky enough to have a safety valve for my despair. I was also lucky enough to have grown up in the tradition of "Depend upon nobody," "Land is treasure," "Land is personal freedom."

(It's not for *my* money that I grieve about this current crisis of the farmers; it's for the possible loss of this great American tradition, this Middle West, land-loving spirit—a spirit on whose capital I borrowed to get me through the worst winter of my life.)

So much for debts and conditioned contrariness. What, you might ask, came of all this irreverent independence I took from here? What purpose was served by this conditioned refusal to accept the status quo if things went bad, this zest for conflict, this

\**In Love and War*.—Eds.

perverse giddiness in having a good excuse to say “no,” this homegrown sense of continually working against the grain, refusing to “be reasonable,” making opponents hurt you as a means to eroding *their* spirit?

Well, I have just described a character who would be the nemesis of the prison commissar in a Koestler novel. My mother (the drama coach some of you knew) had shown me how; all I had to do was act well the given part. Even “acting well the given part” was a part of the heritage I took into prison with me (from my Stanford philosophy program I often recalled the words of the first-century Greek, the crippled slave who became the Stoic philosopher Epictetus):

Remember that you are but an actor in a drama of such sort as the Author chooses—if short, then in a short one; if long, then in a long one. If it be his pleasure that you should enact a poor man, or a cripple, or a ruler, or a private citizen, see that you act it well. For this is your business—to act well the given part, but to choose it belongs to another.

Since tonight I won’t have time to unravel many of the convolutions of my four years of life under pressure, usually in solitary, in a cell block with American pilots—all graduates of college, many from our very best, sophisticated and well-brought-up boys of the sort I see walking around this Knox campus—I’ll quickly paint a composite picture that will at least bring out the basic truths of that existence. They will be truths about the important things—the lessons learned about human nature and what resides within us all “way down here.” Who knows when we will have the need to call up the very best that is in us?

(When I said four years of pressure in a cell block, I meant the middle four years of my eight-year stay. I was almost totally isolated for the first year and a half, and the last two years—after Sybil had got the commissar expelled and the torture stopped, for which details you must read the book—were a piece of cake, like, say, being in Joliet.)

So we are in a cell block in Hoa Lo prison, the old 19th-century French prison in downtown Hanoi, across from the Ministry of Justice. The prison is occupied two-thirds by civilian criminals (who we learn over time are in somewhat the same straits we are). We are isolated in one corner of the prison in an area of 30 individual cells. Each of us has had the same experience. We were shot down, probably hurt in the crash, nearly killed by civilians (which is understandable), rescued by a disciplined army group (also understandable, knowing of the North Vietnamese plans for us), separated (never to see another American for months), slapped around, and displayed to village war rallies as the jeep (traveling at night, with us handcuffed and blindfolded) wound its way toward Hanoi. Finally we are led through the big prison gates, across the moat, and into a sound-proofed torture room where the blindfold is removed and the facts of life explained by an English-speaking native officer: You are criminals; you have no status under international law; you are nonpersons; you have no rank, no name (we will give the guards one for you, one they can remember and pronounce); you live at our sufferance; and now “fill out this paper giving us all the military information you have; write a letter to the Vietnamese people apologizing for wantonly killing ‘women, children,

and old people' and for 'bombing churches, schools, and pagodas'; write a letter to the American people saying you are ashamed to be an American; then tape-record all these, and then we'll have a look at your broken leg."

The young American pilot, sophisticated, knowledgeable, knows the American Code of Conduct, knows about the Geneva Convention of 1949 regarding treatment of Prisoners of War, knows that everything he heard is false, disgusting, and illegal, and says "NO." So in comes the torture guard with a big iron bar and a handful of manila rope. Also a cheering squad and helper gang enter, as the victim is told "You are guilty of ingratitude to the Vietnamese people who have preserved your life; you must be punished." Huzzah! cries the crowd, and down you go with a clout to the jaw, legs into lugs on the iron bar, a methodical winding of ropes about your upper arms from the back, then these ropes are cinched up, blood circulation shut off, cinched up more, head forced down, torture guard standing on your back cinching up more and more, his heel against the back of your head forcing it down to the floor between your splayed legs lugged to the bar. Huzzahs! The interrogator screams in your ear: "Submit!" "Submit!"

Now, if you are the center linebacker of the Chicago Bears, it will probably be altogether 25 minutes from the time you say "NO!" until you submit; if you're me, maybe 15. But we will both submit; no question about it. Death is no option—just how would you get at yourself from that position? So then you are let up; you are dizzy; you are surprised and horrified at how routinely it all went, how YOU—Eagle Scout, All-Conference Guard, Patriot—lost your hard-won virginity in just twenty minutes. Then after you are able to get your hand to work, you scribble something—never quite what they want, but they will come back to that. So they give you something rotten to copy—and you probably do—and that's all till tomorrow. You sleep as you are, on that brick floor with the bare lightbulb on over you, and every few minutes the peephole of the locked door opens and what looks like a human eye can be made out in the darkness behind it.

Then the guilt sets in, the terrible guilt, and then fear for tomorrow. You're in a swirling barrel of confusion, and you can see the bottom of the barrel down there where you are sure to wind up (you have to believe), without self-respect, status, pride, or hope.

Now our good, sophisticated, well-brought-up young officer will probably have enough skill and cunning to come out of this scrape without fully meeting his tormentors' full expectations; but at the very least he'll wind up hurting, guilt-ridden, and fearful. In a few days he will be clapped into a cell in our compound, alone, with the final admonition: "Obey the camp regulations and you will receive the human and lenient treatment of Ho Chi Minh." As he gets his bearings, he reads the pidgin English regulations:

Rule #1: Any attempt to communicate with any other criminals—by wall tap, voice, sounds, writing, or in any way, will be met with severe punishment. You will be forced to atone for any communication crime.

Our young officer gets the idea; one yell or whisper or tap and you're right back in the Mixmaster and they will have established their moral justification for extracting more recorded propaganda, military information, and so forth. A trip-wire system!

Where does he go from here? It depends on his willingness to stake *all* on the comradeship offered by the clandestine American organization percolating beneath the surface throughout the prison. He can go it alone and fall into despair, severe mental depression, or even perverse anger-driven collaboration; or he can help make, and join, an underground American civilization. Ninety-seven percent took the last option. My story will continue to track that group.

The first problem is learning to communicate surreptitiously. We used a 25-letter alphabet arrayed in a five by five matrix on which two numbers—each being 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 (line, row)—identify a particular letter. With this and some operating signals, we had a code that could be used silently (by any motion such as a wiggling toe under a door) or as a tap code through walls (by taking such precautions as amplifying almost silent fingernail ticks by using our farm-pump-style drinking cups as amplifiers—pressing our ear to the base, open end to the wall). How to learn this code once in prison? American ingenuity prevailed in a variety of ways, from starting with a 26-digit tap till the new-comer got the idea of an alphabet, and then coaxing him to be patient enough to go the route of A is 1, Z is 26, till the other system was explained—or sometimes by such lucky means as that used by my first cellmate, a young junior grade lieutenant named Dan Glenn who arrived in my cell fully tap-code qualified: “It is all diagrammed in crayon on the bottom of the interrogator’s table in the torture room; while I was lying on the brick floor after they all left that first night it caught my eye: ALL PRISONERS LEARN THIS CODE.”

One of the first dividends of learning to communicate came in answer to sending that first embarrassed confession of failure to keep your mouth shut during your first torture session with the ropes. Almost everybody experienced that wonderful moment of relief as the answer came back: “Don’t worry; everybody in this cell block has done just what you did and felt like two cents. You’ll be caught and taken back in there again, and you’ll give up information again. It happens to us all, but we’ve got to keep communicating and stick together, tell each other the truth, and work it out as a unified group. Unity over self is our motto.” Unwittingly, we had developed the best of all antidotes to the greatly debilitating side of that old friend of mine, guilt. If you have told your friends the truth, there’s no guilt left.

Some might think that getting organized entailed the forcible imposition of rules by some authoritarian senior prisoner, some kind of a Knight on a White Horse laying down the law. More often, it went like this: You are new, and senior, and when it comes time to speak your piece into this communication network which will relay your words to everybody, you come up with something like: “In this terrible circumstance in which we are all being forced to say and write things we would never choose freely, it is not fair that I add further complications to your lives with rules. Everybody must do the best he can, set his own path toward the good as he sees it.”

Well, that solution will last just about two days. Then some spokesman for that colony of bright and troubled young men who look up to you will reply with something

like this: “You have no right to just sententiously urge us to do the good; you owe it to us to tell us what, in this situation, we should consider the good to be. We deserve to live a life that makes sense to us. There is no way we can arrive at doing what we would normally choose; we must all take a unified stand on what we will require them to torture us for. We must have law, and it is your duty to write it and be responsible for the consequences of it. We deserve to sleep well at night, knowing we have made them hurt us for the right things and thereby done our duty for our prison society.” In prison I found myself starting to learn why Dostoyevsky could have the Grand Inquisitor in his *Brothers Karamazov* rant at Christ about the unfair and tremendous burden of human freedom. There comes a time, under pressure, when people can’t stand freedom; they demand to be led.

I think you get the idea of a whole underground civilization taking root and giving sustenance to this colony of lost Americans. It was driven just as much from the bottom as from the top. The deepest human needs—for traditions, for law, for heroes, for hope, for pride—started to be met as our lives turned inward toward this “new society,” this “country,” this “family.”

What I have described is the most elaborate laboratory a student of human nature could hope for. It could be used for a study of man “in a state of nature.” A college could never afford it, but its psychology faculty would probably give anything for such a setup. All subjects would have a cultural homogeneity (age, education, health, experiences—all about the same); they are all isolated and boxed in with no paper, no books; and there are four full 365-day years to observe them as they are traumatized and crystallized by a constant outside threat.

What comes through those walls via that lightly tapped code amplified by those farm-pump cups? Nastiness? Polarized dogmatism? Bitterness? Joyfulness? Saintliness? Some of all the above, from time to time, but tonight let’s talk about the human characteristics that lie below the usual boring, predictable, issue-oriented fallouts. What lies *below* such simple attitudes? I’ll just talk about five almost universal traits of my sample group. Almost all were:

1. Ritualistic
2. Poetic
3. Fascinated by astronomy, numbers, and music  
(the seven liberal arts were *not* just pulled out of a hat)
4. High-minded, and
5. Devoted to privacy.

Trait 1: Ritualism. Once a human being is isolated in silence, seeing only one face twice a day, the face of a man who does not speak his language and delivers a bowl of rice, he thinks it’s merely a matter of time till he goes crazy. No such luck. After a couple of months you realize you’re stuck with yourself and you might as well get used to it. Sometime soon after that it seems to occur, even to the sort of person whose college room was always chaotically disorganized, that you’ve got to get some routine into your life or you’re going to become an animal. Each in his own way seems to set time aside for

exercise, for meditation, and of course for communication with that neighbor next door at that time of day when the chances of being apprehended are least. One senses that it's "get organized or die." The day becomes full. I can remember saying to myself, "It's late afternoon and the guard is coming with the leg irons for the night and I haven't had a minute to myself. Time flies. Where has the day gone?"

Trait 2: Love of poetry. Another surprise. When your mind gets dried out, as the silence of months overtakes you, you thirst for things to remember. The clutter of all the trivia evaporates from your consciousness and with care you can make deep excursions into past recollections—bringing up seating arrangements at age-five birthday parties and the like. Of course, you learn how not to jolt your memory and derail it, you know how to quit digging when you're tightening up, to relax and think of something else and know the missing link will pop out at you in due course. It's then that the love and memorization of poetry becomes an almost universal preoccupation. Verses were hoarded and gone over each day. Many were composed and sent along for criticism. But the person who came into this experiment with reams of already memorized poetry was the bearer of great gifts. I often chuckled to myself about the professor I had who used to say "Never waste your time memorizing anything you can look up in the library." If we had all followed advice like that, our civilization would have been a very barren thing.

Trait 3: Love of those liberal arts Astronomy, Numbers, and Music. Everybody seemed to know what date it was all the time. There is nothing to that old tale about the prisoner who puts an "x" on the wall every day (also you wouldn't dare put "x's" on walls in Hanoi). There was lots of discussion about the vernal equinox and the phase of the moon, because, unlike dates, Easter was a more involved day to identify. Anyone so fortunate as to catch sight of the moon was obliged to describe its exact phase. In the dust of the cell floors, almost everybody had at one time or another spent that wonderfully interesting month or so figuring out, in the view of the way the earth went around the sun and the moon went around the earth, just exactly how the shadows of the earth should be reflected as moon phases [*sic*].

When it came to numbers I was very fortunate to have a friend who had a master's degree in math who would pass me the sort of expansions found in the back of engineering manuals. One was precious—it was the one in which "e" to the "x" is equal to the sum, from "n" equals 1, to "n" equals infinity, of the expression "x" to the "n minus one" over "n minus one" factorially. Shortly after he gave it to me I was banished to an area where there were no Americans to tap to for a whole winter and spring. I became the world's greatest authority on the exponential curve. That formula allowed me to figure natural logarithms to three or four decimal places in five or six iterations with a stick in the dirt. By scratching them into the bottom of a bedboard with a nail [that] I luckily found, I established tables, converted to the base ten, went through all the scales of the slide rule, and became one of the very few people on earth to actually know why any number to the zero power is necessarily one, why zero factorially is necessarily one. (What a pity today's computer-age kids miss the beautiful symmetry of the exponential system.)

A year later I was lucky enough to be returned to the immediate vicinity of my mathematical friend. We both had played the piano, and our cross-courtyard, under-door

finger signaling fell into the subject of musical scales, why you can't have both seven sharps and seven flats, and how scales that sound good to us have unsymmetrical frequency distributions. We discussed the peculiarity of the latter. How can that be? Is what sounds good a cultural accommodation without regard to mathematical symmetry? Is that why oriental music sounds funny? Of course, it became obvious to us (after several months of contemplation) that there had to be a particular proportionality constantly relating the frequencies of adjacent keys all across the piano keyboard (black to white, white to white, and so on). What was that particular constant? My friend went off the air for a week or two and just thought about it. He came back and said, "It has to be the twelfth root of two." In a few minutes (I had memorized my log tables), I ran that out to be 1.0595. When we got home a music teacher told me that he was right—that that twelfth root of two was a very important constant in music—it was even named after the genius who derived it in the 19th century: Helmholtz's Constant. My mathematical prison friend now has his PhD, but for some odd reason was not honored by getting his name hyphenated with Helmholtz.

Trait 4: High-mindedness. By this I don't mean "joyfulness," and I particularly don't mean "optimistic" (Viktor Frankl and I agree that babbling optimists are the bane of existence to one under stress—give us a pessimist every time for the long pull). What I mean is the gradual erosion of natural selfishness among people of goodwill facing a common danger over time. The more intense the common danger, the quicker the natural selfishness melts. In our situation, at about the two-year point, I think most of us were thinking of that never-seen friend next door, that sole contact with our civilization, that lovely, complicated, imaginative human thing, in terms of "love" in the highest sense. By later comparing notes with others, I found I was not alone in getting so noble and righteous that I could hardly stand myself. People would willingly absorb physical punishment rather than let it fall to their friends. Questions arose in my mind about the validity of the much-talked-about instinct of self-preservation.

I've since done a lot of reading about this, and this phenomenon has lots of precedent, from battlefields and elsewhere. Those who wring their hands at frightful prospects in these "ominous times" apparently don't know it, but the human spirit has a lot of nobility that doesn't show till the going gets tough. You don't have to develop this asset. It will rise, as it has throughout history, to meet great challenges.

It's difficult to explain this high-mindedness that sets in when you're down the trail a way. Solzhenitsyn says it well in one of his Gulag writings:

It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart. . . . And that is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me: . . . "Bless you, prison, for having been in my life."

Trait 5: Privacy. I've described a very intimate relationship between next-door neighbors who know each other only by fingertip sound ticks or fingertip motion, by "feel,"

in the sense that either mode can be made to imprint humor, sarcasm, grief, joy—all the emotions. But sooner or later we all had the experience of a fit of exuberance at suddenly “putting the universe together” in our individual hearts and minds, and of trying to relay these wonderful religious, or at least generally inspirational, keys to the kingdom next door. A very polite and tentative wall touch in reply usually told us “thanks a lot but no thanks.” A suppressed irritation was there and it was clear that what was meant was “I know you’re performing an act of love, but you’re getting into my private territory.” “That solar plexus of my soul is mine alone.”

It is my belief that part of being a human is to have sole access to a certain sacred turf of one’s selfhood, and that he who would rob you of that privacy is violating your right to dignity. There are deep Western roots to this idea from the Aristotelian and Stoic sides: the notion of sovereignty over one’s inner self which he alone controls. Fallouts include the Christian doctrine of personal responsibility for the saving of one’s own soul, the English common law property right of a man’s home being his castle, and so on. Of course, the experimental group’s outside threat was from the extortionist, and although there are lots of ways of describing harsh extortion in terms of physical coercion and isolation, these are merely accelerators for the basic weapons of extortionists from ancient times: the imposition of feelings of fear and guilt in their victims. And that is done first by violating selfhood, that human right, by getting the person to bare his breast, to expose his sacred turf, to “level,” to “interact,” to “confess”—and then to pack his wound with the rock salts of fear and guilt and catch your victim as he falls into your arms.

A political prison is just a worst-case vantage point from which to watch the obvious practice of this ancient art. On the more subtle plane, facilitators use it, religions use it, encounter groups live on it, demagogues preach it (“The end of the world is coming [fear]; give away your wealth [guilt]”), and of course it is formalized in communist dogma as the process of criticism/self-criticism. And the sad part is that I hear some American businesses are starting to “motivate” their executives with these indecent exposures, these heart-to-heart sessions. Perhaps I overkill this tonight, but an old political jailbird senses that point when rational discourse ends and dirty tricks begin. He never forgets the pattern, never forgets the critical mix, and never loses the impulse to spike the action right at the changeover point.

As I close, I think sometimes I’m falling prey to an affliction that comes over all of us, even in prison: taking oneself too seriously. A happy day for us was when the commissar was cashiered and we were all let out into a courtyard in preparation for the last two years of “Joliet-style” normal prison life. We embraced one another, knowing all about each other—children’s ages, wife’s name, age, hometown—but not knowing the exact identity of the never-before-seen face right in front of us. “Who are you?” Such a man before me announced himself to be Dave Hatcher. Dave and I had had a long history of communication and collaboration throughout the four years. I owed him much, particularly his giving me a code name (for secret notes) that had always given me a sense of pride. He had done that when he had had an unexpected opportunity to whisper about my return to a particular cell block to several prisoners. As it happened, this was the very day after he had given me the news that the Navy had a new aircraft carrier called the *Nimitz*. The name he gave me was Chester, and I had put two and two together and

assumed I, being the top Navy guy, was being portrayed as “Chester Nimitz,” thanks to Dave’s thoughtfulness. I said, “Dave, I really appreciated your setting me up with that name Chester.” He smiled naturally, and said in total sincerity: “It came to me in a flash. I knew that if anybody ever caught sight of you they would know exactly who you were because you walk just like that guy in Gunsmoke.”

Finally, I’d like to very briefly connect what I’ve been talking about tonight with what goes on in this place, Knox College. Jeffrey Hart, friend of mine, syndicated columnist, and English professor at Dartmouth, has often quoted his old Columbia University professor Mark Van Doren’s definition of an educated person. “An educated person,” said Mark, “is one who, when required, could refound his own civilization.” You couldn’t build an underground society in hostile territory with just an engineering education. It is only possible with an education in the liberal arts—the kind of education given here. Thank God for schools like this. Hail, Knox All Glorious.



## **Section 2**

### **Published Essays and Articles**

“The Tap Code”

*Military Collector & Historian* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1979), pp. 149–52

In this article on communications technology, Stockdale describes the “tap code” system shown below, which was critical to the organization and leadership of prisoners of war during their captivity in Hanoi, North Vietnam. The mechanics of establishing an effective and unbreakable communications system while under duress—and the evolution of these language-based prisoner communities and dialects during the Vietnam War—reveal lessons in leadership effectiveness, group cohesion, intelligence, and survival. Stockdale demonstrates how the leaders spontaneously and intuitively harnessed the power of the human mind and the resourcefulness of soldiers, even within the confines of war prisons.

	1	2	3	4	5
1	A	B	C	D	E
2	F	G	H	I	J
3	L	M	N	O	P
4	Q	R	S	T	U
5	V	W	X	Y	Z

Exclude K  
(use “C” instead)

“Tap Code” chart. Stockdale explains its use in the original text on the following pages.

## THE TAP CODE

I'm going to write about communications theory in the context of a prison camp in which everybody lives in solitary confinement, a solitary confinement in silence, a solitary confinement in which the use of torture is considered just punishment for those who break that silence to communicate with their fellows. Our Vietnam enemies gave us two ways to go on this. We could lie low and not communicate—and go to seed over the years of silence and solitude. Or we could communicate—as a matter of military duty—and take our lumps. Those near me and I were clearly in the second camp. The problem became how to communicate stealthily.

As a start, of course, you tap on walls, stealthily. The Morse code is no good; it soon becomes obvious that you cannot cope with the limitations of a bitonal system. It's just not practical; you've got to have a reliable, repetitive beat. How do you build a monotonal system? There are many ways, but I believe the most efficient is a method devised back in the day of the American Civil War: drop the letter "K" out of the alphabet (you can always use a "C" where you would use a "K"), and with the resultant 25-letter alphabet, set up a five-by-five matrix, a line across the top "A," "B," "C," "D," "E," and assign beats such as 1-1 for an "A," 1-2 for a "B," 1-3 for a "C," 1-4 for a "D," 1-5 for an "E." On the second line, using the same convention, put five more letters down: 2-1 for "F," 2-2 for "G," and so forth. It follows that the most inefficient letter to transmit is "Z," 5-5. That is about as efficient as you're going to get with one tone and 25 letters.

So far, and throughout, it's all common sense, all human mind. So also for operating signals. You don't need many. I'm sure if I put any number of communications engineers in a cubicle and gave them a contract to devise a system of operating signals they would produce a complicated and cumbersome, cross-indexed monstrosity. We devised operating signals under pressure, under threat of pain, with a real appreciation for safety and efficiency. We found that the only OP signals you need are four: The first is one that says "no," "danger," "stop," or any connotation of the negative. For this you should use any "one" signal—a single thump, the single noise, the single flash, a single wave. The second necessary operational signal should say "yes," "go," "concur," "execute," "good." For this we used two of anything—the next-most-efficient signal. The third necessary signal is "repeat," and that was three for us. Fourth is "wait"—four beats or four what-have-you, in our method. In seven and a half years of communicating almost solely by

some application of the 5×5 matrix, I never experienced, nor did anyone of the 400 that I know experience, a need for another operating signal.

One quickly realizes that the need to protect the channel is paramount. If you had been in isolation for a period of months, maybe years, as I had been, and get back and suddenly establish contact, you learn to be cautious about rushing into conversation. You learn to slow down and, first, agree with your partner about danger signals, second, agree on a cover story if you're caught, and third, you need to decide on a backup comm system. Taking the trouble in that first few minutes of contact to say what happens "when we lose this net" has saved me more than once. You might simply specify a bent wire that indicates a hiding place for a note or an alternate callup procedure; simplicity will get you by, but to ignore the need to establish fallback procedures first can mean months of comm interruption.

You're probably wondering: "How do you learn this monotonal code with its matrix alphabet without prior knowledge?" That's a good question. It turns out to be more of a theoretical than a practical problem. Sometimes you can stick notes in bowls of rice scheduled to be served, sometimes you can whisper under doors. One of my friends knew the matrix format when he came into the cellblock for the first time. He explained that he saw it while forced to lie on the floor in the torture room. The matrix was diagrammed on the bottom of a table with the admonition, "All prisoners learn this code."

In the more common case, the "teacher" must wait until the new prisoner has overcome his initial fear of working the wall by brushing it or thumping it. (He will have been threatened with going through the torture cycle again if he breaks silence.) He must decide to take a chance and hope that it's not a guard trying to trick him into violating the camp "rules" of absolute silence. For some to overcome such apprehension takes months; for some, days; and for a very few, hours. Experienced men found that for the most sluggish "student," it's best to commence by tapping 26 times on the wall. In a matter of hours or minutes or days or maybe longer, depending upon who it is, the guy on the other side realizes that you're talking about an alphabet. He eventually makes some kind of recognition signal of his own design. He lets you know he understands that another human is using an alphabet. That's the start. Communication is fundamentally the connection of one brain to another, and they are sensitive instruments. I stress throughout: Don't sell your brain short. It can do better than the artificial intelligence designers think it can. Once the novice knows that you're talking about an alphabet, it's a good assumption that "A" is probably 1 and 26 is probably "Z." If this understanding is slow to develop, one way that's been used is to send your partner an 8 and then pause and then a 9. Eventually his mind lights up—8, 9; "H," "I"—"Hi!" Now you're in business—an inefficient business, but a corner has been turned in this brain-to-brain relationship. Now you can start the laborious days and hours of trying to describe the regular communications system by this very primitive code.

How do you call them up? How do you roger? What's the procedure? We borrowed from a very American rhythm pattern for a callup signal: the "shave and a haircut." When an American hears "shave and a haircut," even if he's never thought of a code, he almost automatically lunges to the wall and supplies his "two bits." We rogered with a 2, a "yes," as an affirmative signal after each *word* was copied or understood. (Of course,

some of the words are long and you can tap them off early once you're ready to "buy" on the basis of what you've heard.) A very primitive form of encryption thus develops from the "early tap off." The interloper who does not know your language and doesn't know what has occurred between your two minds and how well you understand one another can't intercept. Abbreviations foul him up even more, and abbreviation patterns can change over time with any two partners. A man who is granted a contract to come up with an abbreviation table would probably give you something that would have to be changed almost entirely after the first month of use. But abbreviations hammered out in the field are solid. For example, frequently you had to use the word "think" (*TK*); I could go on and give you hundreds more. They grew up in different camps with substantial variations. As people were mixed and new tappers came on the other wall, it amounted to a system of dialects. Yet we became accustomed to one another's dialects easily. If we didn't understand their abbreviation, we wouldn't give them the "2" until they'd spelled it out.

What I have described here is a jam-free system that can't be countered. First of all, you've got the discrete signature of your partner, you've got his style. (For instance, no two people give the old Steve Canyon flamboyant "Roger, Roger" exactly the same way. The personality comes out. You recognize your friend by the way he expresses the "Roger, Roger"—by the speed, the touch, whether he means "yes," "OK," "concur," or "good," or "WILCO," or "Oh, yeah?" or "yes sir," or whatever.) I understand that the Soviets back up all of their telemetry nets with a key. I certainly understand why.

This matrix system lent itself to other applications, like a visual flash system. Also, every time a detailed man would sweep the courtyard he would be sending out a regular newspaper. Snickers would be heard in the cellblock and the guard would become rattled. Every time we swept our toilet buckets out we were acting as town criers. We even developed a vocal tap code. I give credit to my classmate Jerry Denton for that. Ones or twos were made with coughs or sniffs. The number three was a throat clear, the number four was a hawk, and number five was either an exaggerated sneeze or a spit, depending on the conditions.

For official traffic, the senior ranking officer insisted that all members memorize the message. That was our law. (Nothing was written down, of course.)

We thus became acquainted with the storage capacity of our minds—how many words we could memorize, etc. Of course, it laid a big weight on the message composer because he had to put things out in a logical pattern so that a reasonable man could memorize them handily.

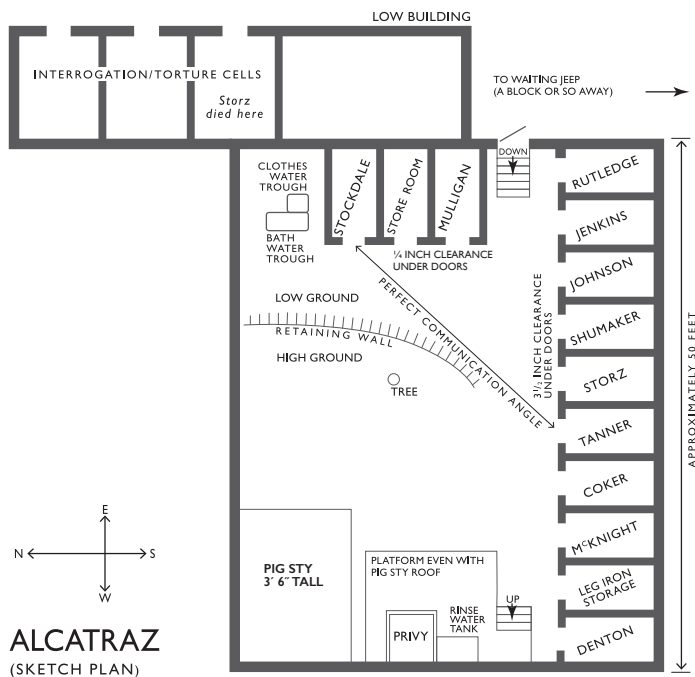
I can remember one afternoon in the little prison called Alcatraz where several of us spent a couple of years, where I as the senior officer had been sending out a long series of messages concerning how we were going to combat what we called the "Fink Release Program." (This was one you people at home were supposed to think was a benevolent early-release program, whereas it actually amounted to buying your way out by becoming a propaganda tool.) It was a complicated subject. I sent out six 50-word groups, flashing them on call across to Nels Tanner. (I had to flash them because my cell was across the courtyard.) After receiving each group, Nels would have to leave his place under the door where he had seen my finger, go to the wall and tap it out in both

directions, and come back under the door. It would take a couple of hours or more to get a 300-word message (composed well enough that they would all memorize it) out to everybody. I remember just before being put in irons for the night (as we were every afternoon at 4 p.m.), Nels was saying goodnight (GN), under the door, as he always said to me. He added that he had handled about 5,000 words that day—that's a lot of traffic.

All of this was happening in a little place like Alcatraz where 11 of us, each in a tiny cell, were supposedly being thwarted in our comm attempts by two armed guards, each constantly patrolling, listening, trying to find if there were any unauthorized sounds about. This went on for years.

Cryptography got more sophisticated as we handled classified information. We had date-time groups, we would "slide" the alphabet, we used a matrix to develop a script that really looked like chicken tracks, rotating the axes depending on the day and the date. What I'm saying is that if you take about five good commonsensical manipulations with some versatility such as a rotating axis, a slide, a convention for each day, and put them in series, you can come up with a code that cannot be broken. When I got home, I challenged the DIA to break a sample that was written out to demonstrate to them the strength of our system, and they couldn't do it. There were just too many variables. Your minds can come up with combinations in 30 minutes that computers can never break.

Why did I say that we as communicators, you and I, when immersed in the technical world, don't give enough benefit to the human mind? First of all, we complicate matters by always looking for a perfect system. A perfect system serves an idiot; it's bound to be



Source: *In Love and War*

too complex. I think there's a lot of wisdom in old Admiral Gorshkov's maxim that "The best is the enemy of the good enough." Second, I believe that an overblown communication capacity gives our military commanders bad habits. You've got to think through the possibility of a communications blackout, and it's difficult when our officers are brought up in an environment of total communications. I had more trouble in Hanoi, even with senior officers, wasting so much time trying to speculate about what they thought Washington would think of our policies. They had been conditioned by good communications for years to be ill at ease when they weren't able to touch base with headquarters. Imagine it: we were sitting in a position where we knew more about how to run a prison organization than anybody else in the world at that time, and our "conditioned" officers were uncomfortable in relying on their own spontaneity and intuition. I told the midshipmen at the Naval Academy that I think there is a greater possibility of their having to depend on their own initiative in an "out of communications" situation than was necessary for my generation, what with the probable difficulties of radio wave transmissions in nuclear clouds. Third, I bad-mouth the communications profession because it seems to ignore Schelling's and other strategists' admonitions to not forget the tactical advantages of being out of communication. Think about it. If it is patently clear to your adversary that you cannot receive a message, there is no way he can send you an ultimatum. There are advantages to a commander when his troops know he cannot be contacted. They cannot ask for relief.

What I'm saying is that, contrary to the Naval Academy motto, which breaks out of the Latin to read "From knowledge, seapower," often, in many circumstances, real strength and power lie in ignorance.

## **“Moral Leadership,” September 1980**

**U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 106/9/931 (September 1980), pp. 86–89**

This article on moral leadership was published after Stockdale decided to resign as president of The Citadel. There is no doubt that his quest to maintain moral leadership played a role in his decision to leave.

In the article, Stockdale highlights the importance of moral virtue as the bedrock for good leaders. He summarizes four dominant leadership styles in American history, as introduced by psychoanalyst Michael Maccoby:

- *Craftsmen*—“Do-it-yourselfers,” who were intelligent and hardworking and made decisions on their own. Benjamin Franklin was a craftsman.
- *Jungle fighters*—These were epitomized by Industrial Revolution-era leaders such as Andrew Carnegie. Describing them, Stockdale writes, “[T]here was just so much business out there and these were the men who knew how to stake out territory and get it.”
- *Organization men*—These leaders were dominant after World War I, as large businesses became bureaucracies. Their commitment and loyalty to the organization were prime.
- *Gamesmen*—These leaders appeared in the 1960s. Stockdale describes their ethos: “American life can be analyzed as a ‘game’ in which any number can play and win.” Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara took control of the military during this period. Stockdale laments, “For 20 years, we’ve been surrounded by gamesmen unable to cope with the wisdom of the ages.”

Moral leadership is necessary, whether in prison or in a free society.

## MORAL LEADERSHIP

Extortion—the squeeze-play drawing out of victims by force or compulsion—is dramatized in Godfather movies as an easily recognized, explicit, usually illegal way of conducting business. In reality, though, it is conducted much more frequently in subtler ways—ways which are both more difficult to recognize and more difficult to deal with. And by no means are these ways illegal, at least not in the sense that I use the word. We frequently face extortionary pressures in our everyday life, for extortion is just a concentrated form of manipulation through the use of fear and guilt. We who are in hierarchies—be they academic, business, military, or some other sort—are always in positions in which people are trying to manipulate us, to get moral leverage on us. It is the wise leader who comes to the conclusion that he can't be had if he can't be made to feel guilty. That is as true today in a free environment as it was for me during my years in prison camp. You have got to keep yourself clean—never do or say anything of which you can be made to be ashamed—in order to avoid being manipulated. A smart man, an ethical man, never gives a manipulator an even break. He is always prepared to quench the extortionist's artful insinuation of guilt with the ice water of a truthful, clear-conscience put-down. The more benign the environment, the more insidious is the extortionist's style. "Then Arthur learned," says the legend, "as all leaders are astonished to learn, that peace, not war, is the destroyer of men; tranquillity rather than danger is the mother of cowardice, and not need but plenty brings apprehension and unease."

This is not to suggest that there is only one way to lead, one manner of leadership, one style that best fits all circumstances. Of course not. I have merely said that all styles must be built on moral virtue. On specific leadership styles, I learned much from a talk by a psychoanalyst named Michael Maccoby. With a comprehensive understanding of American history, and after in-depth interviews of more than 200 American leaders of the 1970s, Maccoby concluded that there were four dominant leadership styles in the American past.

Now, there are two things to remember as I quickly go over this analysis of Maccoby's. First of all, examples of men who embody each style have always been around and are still around; it's just that the challenges of different historic periods seemed to draw out particular types of leaders. And second, don't look for progress in leadership styles as we walk through this analysis. The leaders as leaders or as men don't get better as we follow the historic process.

From the Declaration of Independence until the credit system started to grow in the 1870s after the Civil War, most American leaders fell into a category he calls “craftsmen.” They were “do-it-yourself” guys: self-reliant, strong-willed, cautious, suspicious, harder on themselves than they are on others. Benjamin Franklin was cited as their prototype then, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn now. Their target of competition was not other men, but rather their idea of their own potential. Craftsmen climbed ladders not to get ahead of others, but to achieve that level of excellence they believed they had within themselves. They are mountain climbers, not players of what systems analysts call “zero-sum-games.” They liked to make up their own minds; they did not buy school solutions. Craftsmen were men of conscience.

The industrial revolution and the need of its necessary credit and banking base were met by a new breed of leaders: Maccoby called them the “jungle fighters.” Jungle fighters played “zero-sum-games” with gusto; there was just so much business out there and these were the men who knew how to stake out territory and get it. Andrew Carnegie, the steel magnate, was the prototype. Like craftsmen, jungle fighters were also men of conscience. Although they could sit at the board of directors’ table and figuratively decapitate incompetents with aplomb, they grieved. Characteristically they did not dodge issues; they settled scores eyeball to eyeball, tasting not only the self-satisfaction of authority but also the agony of pity.

After World War I, as the giant businesses the jungle fighters had built became bureaucracies, and as “public relations” grew into an everyday national preoccupation, those jungle fighters were gradually displaced by the smoother “organization men.” Like the jungle fighters, the organization men were paternalistic and authoritarian. But unlike those pioneers of industry and finance who were motivated primarily by competitive zeal, “organization men,” our psychoanalyst believes, were more motivated by a fear of failure. They were, nevertheless, characteristically honest; they were cautious men of conscience. They looked men in the eye when they fired them. They were “men of the heart,” possessing qualities with an emotional content: a sense of commitment, loyalty, humor, and spontaneity.

In the early 1960s, a fourth style emerged to take the prominent leadership role. Maccoby identifies practitioners of this style as “the gamesmen.” The gamesmen, impatient under the yoke of their paternalistic and authoritarian bosses, and educated more often than not in game-theory-oriented business schools, turned over a new page in leadership practices. The gamesmen believe that if one properly analyzes the “game” of life, the “game” of management, the “game” of leadership, one sees that it is not necessary to frame the problem as a “zero-sum-game.” Rather, in their minds, American life can be analyzed as a “game” in which any number can play and win.

These gamesmen were relaxed, objective, open-minded, detached, cerebral swingers. Such emotional baggage as commitment or conscience they deemed inefficient and unnecessary. “Play your cards rationally to win and go to bed and sleep like a baby without remorse.” Some bothered with love and families; many gave them a tentative try and quit when they found them too burdensome. Maccoby said that there was a theatrical production that typified the leaders of each of these four ages and that the drama of the gamesmen was portrayed in the movie *The Sting*. You might remember that screenplay;

in it, fair, competitive, cooperative swingers, with the aid of teamwork and technology, destroyed the hung-up, authoritarian “Godfather.”

The gamesmen, concluded psychoanalyst Maccoby, were basically “men of the head”: cool, intellectual types, walking calculating machines. “Men of the head” do many things well, but often have trouble coping with unpleasantness. These self-confident, cool, flexible men don’t like to discipline people, they don’t like to look people in the eye when they fire them. Moreover, they often crave to be loved, and that is a great leadership weakness. True leaders must be willing to stake out territory and identify and declare enemies. They must be fair and they may be compassionate, but they cannot be addicted to being loved by everybody. The man who has to be loved is an extortionist’s dream. That man will do anything to avoid face-to-face unpleasantness; often he will sell his soul for praise. He can be had.

It was in the heyday of these gamesmen that some of their number, the cool, glib, analytical, cerebral so-called defense intellectuals, took charge of the Pentagon under the direction of Robert Strange McNamara. At that juncture, I was fortunate enough to take a two-year sabbatical from military service for study at Stanford University. It was there that I started asking myself what truly rules the world: sentiment, efficiency, honor, justice?

The educated man, particularly the educated leader, copes with the fact that life is not fair. The problem for education is not to teach people how to deal with success but how to deal with failure. And the way to deal with failure is not to invent scapegoats or to lash out at your followers. Moreover, a properly educated leader, especially when harassed and under pressure, will know from his study of history and the classics that circumstances very much like those he is encountering have occurred from time to time on this earth since the beginning of history. He will avoid the self-indulgent error of seeing himself in a predicament so unprecedented, so unique, as to justify his making an exception to law, custom, or morality in favor of himself. The making of such exceptions has been the theme of public life throughout much of our lifetimes. For 20 years, we’ve been surrounded by gamesmen unable to cope with the wisdom of the ages. They make exceptions to law and custom in favor of themselves, because they choose to view ordinary dilemmas as unprecedented crises.

Of course, it has been generally toward the above issue that I directed a course at the Naval War College. My formula for attacking this problem—both at the War College and in my present assignment at The Citadel—is the assignment of enough hard-core philosophy (The Book of Job, the Socratic dialogues of Plato, some of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Epictetus’ *Enchiridion*, enough of Immanuel Kant to understand his concept of duty) and the reading of enough high-quality ultimate-situation literature (Feodor Dostoyevsky’s *House of the Dead*, Albert Camus’s *Plague*, Joseph Conrad’s *Typhoon*, and Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd*) as to deter self-pity when in extremis. With philosophy as the parent discipline, a discussion of courage might be focused on the writer who most thoroughly treated it, Aristotle. This might lead to the question of the validity of his viewpoint that courage is impossible in the absence of fear, that courage might be defined as a measure of how well one handles fear. How about the relationship between fear and imagination? Conrad has one of his characters state that imagination is the

mother of fear. Must not a leader have imagination? If that breeds fear, might that not sap his courage? He surely must have courage above all else . . . etc. From such readings and discussions come understandings and clarifications of those elements of leadership which served in antiquity and those which must serve now.

Leadership must be based on goodwill. Goodwill does not mean posturing and, least of all, pandering to the mob. It means obvious and wholehearted commitment to the helping of followers. We are tired of leaders we fear, tired of leaders we love, and most tired of leaders who let us take liberties with them. What we need for leaders are men of the heart who are so helpful that they, in effect, do away with the need of their jobs. But leaders like that are never out of a job, never out of followers. Strange as it sounds, great leaders gain authority by giving it away.

I am firmly convinced that the time I spent at Stanford has been a major force in molding my own personality as a leader. And I am just as firmly convinced that education in the classics and in the principles of human relationships gave me far better preparation for being a prisoner of war than did the traditional survival-and-evasion training. My ideas on the art of moral leadership received their most profound testing in the stress and degradation—yes, in the extortion environment—of a Communist prisoner of war camp.

The intensity and stark drama of my eight years in North Vietnam provided a quantity and range of leadership challenges that would more than fill an ordinary lifetime. In mere months or weeks, men made and destroyed their reputations. Those behind bars seemed to be scanning reams of data on the problems of good and evil in fast time. The extortion system, powered by our enemy's willingness to torture and impose isolation, quickly drove to the surface issues of moral integrity which at the pace of normal life could take years to fester and erupt into public view.

For united resistance, men had to get on quickly with the business of assimilating knowledge of the character traits of their fellow prisoners. This knowledge had to be more penetrating and more calculating than the sort commonly found sufficient for amicable social life out here in freedom. Is the newcomer emotionally stable? (We had to make a good guess as to whether he had the steadfastness and composure to warrant being trusted with secret material in that torture environment.) Does he have moral integrity? In the privacy of the torture room, will he go to the wall in silence, or do what is so commonplace in the business world nowadays and try to make a deal? Is he sophisticated enough to avoid falling for the interrogator's bait? Will he work his way out on a limb by "gabbing" after that clever interrogator has dangled before him such American-life enticements as: "Let us reason together" and "You are a pragmatic people, meet us halfway?"

In the extortion environment one can always better his own position at the expense of his fellows by holding still for the manipulator's setting up of subtle compromises. A loner makes out by making acknowledged or tacit deals. This will never do. The intensity of life in jail clearly illuminated for us prisoners of war the truth that for the greatest good for the greatest number of us, for our maximum happiness, maximum self-respect, maximum protection of one another, each of us had to submerge our individual survival instincts into an ideal of universal solidarity. "No deals" and "Unity over self" became our mottos.

Some of you are doubtless skeptical of the practicability of such ideals, which seem to ask more of a man than human nature might be thought to allow. To the skeptics, let me say right off that when there is leadership by example, and when there is a commonly shared threat of total estrangement and humiliation, united magnanimous behavior can become a reality. When a man looks at the bottom of the barrel through creeping and growing fissures in the thin veneer of civilization that coats his existence, he suddenly realizes that his slip back into barbarism could come about in weeks. As he peers over the edge of his world, it dawns on him how lonesome and terrible it would be down there without communication, friends, or common cultural ties. He vividly realizes how men, fellow countrymen, need one another for understanding and for sanity. As he sees himself clinging to a receding civilization with his fingernails, it becomes clear to him that “No deals” and “Unity over self” are not goody-goody idealistic slogans; rather, they are practical guides to action.

We saw that we had to build and tend our own civilization if we were to keep ourselves from becoming animals. A man must relate to a community, a commonality of communication style, a commonality of ritual, of laws, of traditions, of poetry, of shared dreams, if he is to prevail, if he is to resist. “Man does not live by bread alone.” Learning the truth and full meaning of that biblical adage was lesson number one for us in that crucible of pressure. It goes without saying that the first job of leadership is to provide the communication necessary for that civilization, that ritual, those laws, those traditions.

The problem was to improvise a communications system for a prison camp in which everybody lived in solitary confinement, a solitary confinement in silence, a solitary confinement in which the use of torture was considered just punishment for those who break that silence to communicate with their fellows. Our Vietnam enemies gave us two ways to go on this. We could lie low and not communicate and go to seed over the years of silence and solitude. (One starts “looking for a friend” after a couple of years.) Or we could communicate as a matter of duty and take our lumps. Since the dictates of conscience and morality made the latter the only way to go, the problem became how to communicate stealthily. For us, trapped in isolation in Hanoi, the means for that communication was a tap code that would break through the walls of solitary confinement, the walls of silence. (For the mechanics of the code, I suggest reading Commander Everett Alvarez’s “Sound: A POW’s Weapon,” pages 91–93 in the August 1976 *Proceedings*.)

Leadership basics are vividly portrayed in the prison camp example. Prison serves as a useful “test bed” (to use a test pilot expression) in which to study in detail man’s behavior under stress, stress of the sort under which many of life’s crucial decisions are necessarily made. Mark this down in your book as lesson two: in the high-stress situation, “status” will not carry you as a leader. That is to say, you have to have more going for you than your title, your seniority, your position in your hierarchy, your rank. You cannot get by with performing like a quarterback who is functional only while being protected “in the pocket”; you’ve got to be able to scramble and improvise, on your feet, and alone. Even this assumes that by the time the pressure is on, you would have earned your followers’ respect, and not just their fear or friendship. Unless people respect you as a leader, when the fat is in the fire they’ll just listen to your orders and calmly walk away.

Lesson three: under stress, ordinary “transactional” leadership will never cut it. That is to say, transactional leadership—propelled simply by the effect of give and take, leadership driven by the base instincts of the marketplace and bargaining table, whereby the leader makes an accommodation in the expectation that his followers will make a complementary accommodation—simply will not stand up. This may come as news to you because the “transactional” leader/follower relationship is so much a part of our way of doing business in everyday economic, social, even academic life. But what to us is the ordinary dance of life, the dance propelled by continuous compromise, finds itself floundering under pressure. Inputs are needed from “transforming” leaders. Transforming leaders don’t simply analyze what they think their people want and then try to give them part of it and hope they will receive a counteraccommodation in return. Transforming leaders instruct and inspire their followers to recognize worthy needs, and they make those needs their wants. They have a way of raising their followers out of their everyday selves and into their better selves, of making them conscious of the high-minded goals that lie unconscious beneath their self-centered desires. In summary, the transforming leader has the wisdom to read the minds of his flock, to understand what they want, to know what they ought to want, and he has the persuasive power to implant the latter into their hearts.

In all that I have been saying, I’ve made the points that leaders under pressure must keep themselves absolutely clean morally; the relativism of the social sciences will never do. They must lead by example, must be able to implant high-mindedness in their followers, must have competence beyond status, and must have earned their followers’ respect by demonstrating integrity. What I’ve been describing as the necessary leadership attributes under pressure are the bedrock virtues all successful leaders must possess, “under pressure and otherwise.” Prison was just the “test bed,” just the meat grinder that vividly illuminated these prime building blocks for me.



## **“What Is Worth Resigning For?,” September 1980**

***Washington Post*, 21 September 1980**

Stockdale explains the thought process he went through when he resigned from his position as president of The Citadel after only one year on the job. He also talks about the split in reactions to his resignation between his peers and those much younger, in their twenties and thirties.

Stockdale challenges each of us to ask ourselves what principles are so important in our lives that we would resign from our jobs to uphold them.

## WHAT IS WORTH RESIGNING FOR?

A few weeks ago, I abruptly resigned from my post as a college president—and walked off the campus feeling good about my decision. The sequence of events had been very straightforward. I had found conditions that I believed to be detrimental to students and unfair to faculty, conditions with which I did not wish to be identified. When it became clear to me that prompt reform was impossible, that my governing board's resistance to change would swallow me up and saddle me with a period of complicity, I checked out. . . .

The specifics are really not very interesting. . . . The interesting part has been the split in the reactions to my resignation among those generally on my side. The split cuts right down the age line. With a few notable exceptions, my elders say, "Regrettable. Too bad you couldn't work out a consensus, a compromise with your governing board." My younger adult friends sing a different tune: "Way to go!" "Stick it in their ear!"

This is not the first time I've come across this new attitude, this new spirit in our educated men and women in their 20s and 30s. I don't write it off as a fallout of the 1960s, or as irresponsible exuberance of youth, or as a manifestation of inexperience. I think it is born of a new, responsible awakening of moral sensitivity. I like it. My first brush with it came when I was president of the Naval War College. There I taught a course in moral philosophy and periodically required each of my students to submit a paper on the resolution of moral dilemmas he had experienced, or observed, or read about. The student picked the subject, but naturally in a course given in the 1970s to military officers and government civilians, educated men and women between 30 and 45, issues of the Vietnam War got a lot of play. The same difference of attitude between youth and age on how to deal with catch-22 squeeze plays, how to deal with responsibility without authority, how to deal with being trapped in the rising waters of complicity without access to either faucet or drain plug, showed up in those papers.

An oft-chosen Vietnam dilemma along those lines was the problem of the on-scene military commander who was deluged by overcontrol and meddling from Washington. The older officer typically wrote: "Our commanders frequently could not do what they thought was right. They were forced to make continual compromises. Nevertheless, they had a lifetime of experience that their country needed and thus a moral obligation to hang in there and work it out. No purpose would have been served by their stepping down in protest." More than a few young bucks—Army, Navy, Air Force,

Marines—had a different slant: “It was a bad show. No officer should let himself get trapped into compromising or waffling his principles. Any commander worth his salt so trapped should quit in protest.”

Has my generation become hooked on collegial solutions, on “keeping the lid on,” on “seeking a consensus,” on making a deal to preserve unanimity? Corporate life, board life, and hierarchical life breed that slide to accommodation that we are told is necessary to get something accomplished, *and* that invitation to moral weakness. If you don’t think any weakness is incurred by having been conditioned to reasonable compromise, try living in a communist jail for a few years. There, all they want is for you to “be reasonable.” The name of their game is extortion, and the source of their leverage lies in their imposition of feelings of fear and guilt. Step One is getting the American prisoner to make a deal, a reasonable deal; *any* deal will do for a start. From my own experience, I can state that a “Prison Interrogator’s Handbook” would list among suggested openers: “Let us reason together.” “You Americans are a sensible pragmatic people; meet us halfway.”

I do not advocate a POW name, rank, and serial number stance at every board of directors meeting here at home. But neither do I advocate suppressing moral sensibility in the interest of cooperation—or tenure. Professor Richard A. Gabriel of St. Anselm’s College, a prolific writer on military ethics, points out in the May issue of *Army* magazine that over the last 20 years Canada has had 27 generals retire or resign in protest, while during the same period the U.S. Army has had one.

It’s my guess that when today’s American young people reach their peak, their statistics in this respect—in military, corporate, or academic life—will change. And that ain’t all bad.



## **“Experiences as a POW in Vietnam,” 19 October 1973**

*Readings in International Law from the Naval War College Review 1947–1977*, ed. Richard B. Lillich and John Norton Moore, International Law Studies, vol. 62 (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1980), pp. 392–96

Stockdale reflects on his then-recent return from and experiences during more than seven years as a prisoner of war (POW) in North Vietnam. He addresses topics that include homecoming, survival, education, organization, counterculture, and personal philosophy, emphasizing his desire truly to return home and establish his identity apart from the weights of being an “ex-POW” or “professional ex-prisoner.” He concludes with a stanza from the poem “Invictus,” which was gifted to him in a note sent—at considerable risk—by then-POWs Dave Hatcher and Jerry Coffee.

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In 1984, this speech also was published as a chapter in Stockdale’s book *A Vietnam Experience*.



Source: Official U.S. Navy photo

## EXPERIENCES AS A POW IN VIETNAM

Last February, when I first touched foot on American soil, I was asked to make a few remarks on behalf of the ex-POWs who were embarked in the airplane with me. An ancient verse came to mind that best summarized my relief at dropping the mantle of leadership and responsibility I had held during 7½ years of imprisonment, four of them in solitary. These lines are attributed to Homer; I remember them well because of their modern ring: “Nothing is so sweet as to return from sea and listen to the raindrops on the rooftops of home.”

Well, I was dreaming. I had forgotten that an old sea captain’s job does not end when he anchors in homeport.

My wife, Sybil, and I have a private joke. Before I returned, she was advised by a Navy psychiatrist: “The fellow will probably make a quick readjustment to modern society if you will remember one rule for the first few months: Don’t put him in decision-making situations.” Well, the reality of my postconfinement simply did not allow such an environment. In the past year, I have probably made more important decisions than in any like period in my life.

Today I find myself truly back home. I am back with old friends, back in my native Middle West, and I have decided that this is my last public speech as an ex-POW. I have no ambition to become a professional ex-prisoner. As soon as I finish today, I am going down to my farm in Knox County for a couple of days, then to Colorado to spend the weekend with my second son, who is in college there, then back to San Diego. Next week I hope to check out of the hospital, and, hopefully, I will be ready for a good seagoing job.

Incidentally, before we were released by the North Vietnamese, I had occasion to be approached by other prisoners who were thinking about their careers. We were all more or less pessimistic about our future utility to our services. Not with any malice; it was just that we had been used to living that stoic life and faced up to the fact that there was a good chance that our service careers had been overcome by time.

We came home to find that the service was devoted to giving us every chance to regain that time. I am informed, as our Navy ex-POWs' duty assignments are made, and their orders are good, that each man has been given the personal attention his devotion to duty deserves.

As a theme for this audience, I will address the subject of how a group of middle Americans—average American guys who have chosen military life as a profession—survived in a POW situation and returned home with honor.

The conditions under which American POWs existed have changed radically since World War II. It is no longer a matter of simply being shot into your parachute, going to a reasonably pleasant *Hogan's Heroes* prison camp, and sweating out the end of the war. At least it was not that way in Vietnam. In Vietnam the American POW did not suddenly find himself on the war's sidelines. Rather, he found himself on one of the major battlefronts—the propaganda battlefield.

Our enemy in Vietnam hoped to win his war with propaganda. It was his main weapon. Our captors told us they never expected to defeat us on the battlefield, but did believe they could defeat us on the propaganda front.

Unlike the World War II POW, who was considered a liability, a drain on enemy resources and manpower, the American POW in Vietnam was considered a prime political asset. The enemy believed that sooner or later every one of us could be broken to his will and used as ammunition on the propaganda front. Some of us might take more breaking than others, but all of us could be broken.

Thus, for Americans who became POWs in Vietnam, capture meant not that we had been neutralized, but that a different kind of war had begun—a war of extortion.

For the sane man, there is always an element of fear involved when he is captured in war. In Vietnam the enemy capitalized on this fear to an extreme degree. We were told we must live by sets of rules and regulations no normal American could possibly live by. When we violated these rules and regulations, we gave our captors what they considered sufficient moral justification for punishing us—binding us in ropes, locking us in stocks for days and weeks on end, locking us in torture cuffs for weeks at a time, and beating us to bloody pulps. As we reached our various breaking points, we were “allowed” to apologize for our transgressions and to atone for them by “confessing our crimes” and condemning our government.

At this point you may be asking the question, Had the POWs received any training to prepare themselves for possible capture? The answer is yes, and it was based on two things that I have come to respect very, very much.

One was on the taking of physical abuse. I think if you were to prepare yourself to be a prisoner of war—and I cannot imagine anybody going about that methodically—one should include a course of familiarization with pain. For what it is worth, I learned the merits of men having taken the physical abuse of body contact, as in sports.

It is a very important experience; you have to practice hurting. There is no question about it.

Second, survival school was based on taking mental harassment. Also, I came out of prison being very happy about the merits of plebe year at the Naval Academy. I hope we

do not ever dilute those things. You have to practice being hazed. You have to learn to take a bunch of junk and accept it with a sense of humor.

On the subject of education, beyond the scope of survival school, there is always the question: Do we need to start giving a sort of counterpropaganda course? Should we go into the political indoctrination business?

I am not very enthusiastic about that. I think the best preparation for an American officer who may be subjected to political imprisonment is a broad, liberal education that gives the man at least enough historical perspective to realize that those who excelled in life before him were, in the last essence, committed to play a role. He learns that though it is interesting to speculate about the heavens and the earth and the areas under the earth and so forth, when it comes right down to it, men are more or less obliged to play certain roles, and they do not necessarily have to commit themselves on issues that do not affect that role.

Now, how does the average American—which is what the POW is—deal with his world? On a day-to-day basis, the POW must somehow communicate with his fellows. Together they must establish a viable set of rules and regulations to live by. We were military men. We knew we were in a combat situation and that the essential element of survival and success in a combat situation is military discipline. That meant, isolated though we were from each other, we could not afford to live in a democracy. We had no choice but to live in a strictly disciplined military organization—if you will, a military dictatorship.

Our captors knew this as well as we did. Several members of Hanoi's Central Committee had spent long periods in confinement as political prisoners. They felt that we too were political prisoners. They held as their highest priority the prevention of a prisoner organization because they knew an organized body of prisoners could beat their system. If they were to get what they wanted from us, they had to isolate every American who showed a spark of leadership. They did so. They plunged many of us into a dark solitary confinement that lasted, in some cases, for years.

For us the Code of Conduct became the ground we walked on. I am not aware that any POW was able, in the face of severe punishment and torture, to adhere strictly to name, rank, and serial number, as the heroes always did in the old-fashioned war movies, but I saw a lot of Americans do better. I saw men scoff at the threats and return to torture 10 and 15 times. I saw men perform in ways no one would have ever thought to put in a movie, and because they did perform that way, we were able to establish communication, organization, a chain of command—an effective combat unit. We lost some battles, but I believe we won the war.

In fact, I am not so sure we lost many battles. Unless you have been there, it is difficult to imagine the grievous insult to the spirit that comes from breaking under torture and saying something the torturer wants you to say. For example, "My government is conducting a criminal war. I am a war criminal. I bomb churches, schools, and pagodas." Does that sound silly to you? It does to me. But I and many others were tortured in ropes for that statement. The reason it was important to take torture for that statement was to establish the credibility of our defiance—for personal credibility—so that the enemy would know that they must pay a high price to get us into public if they ever could. Needless to say, in a POW situation, viable leadership is not possible without

example. In a unit with good communication, almost everyone knows what everyone else is doing or not doing most of the time.

In short, what I am saying is that we communicated. Most of the time most of us knew what was happening to those Americans around us. POWs risked military interrogation, pain, and public humiliation to stay in touch with each other, to maintain group integrity, to retain combat effectiveness.

We built a successful military organization, and in doing so created a counterculture. It was a society of intense loyalty—loyalty of men one to another; of rigid military authoritarianism that would have warmed the cockles of the heart of Frederick the Great; of status, with such unlikely items as years in solitary, number of times tortured, and months in irons as status symbols.

Most men need some kind of personal philosophy to endure what the Vietnam POWs endured. For many it is religion; for many it is [a] patriotic cause; for some it is simply a question of doing their jobs even though the result—confinement as a POW—may not seem necessarily fair. For myself, it seemed that becoming a POW somewhere, someday, was a risk I accepted when I entered the Naval Academy. I think it is fair to say that most POWs—including, certainly, those who did not attend service academies—felt the same way. They accepted this as a risk they undertook when they took their oath as officers. To be sure, very few sat around bemoaning their fate, asking the heavens, “Why me?”

As POWs who were treated not as POWs but as common criminals, we sailed uncharted waters. The Code of Conduct was the star that guided us, although several of us are making recommendations for its modification, particularly in the area of a prisoner’s legal status. The Code did not provide for our day-to-day existence; we wrote the laws we had to live by. We established means for determining seniority. We wrote criteria and provided mechanisms for relieving men of command for good and sufficient cause—and we used those mechanisms. We set a line of resistance we thought was within the capability of each POW to hold, and we ruled that no man would cross that line without significant torture. Thus, in effect, we ordered men to [suffer] torture. This was what I remembered when I finally made the extremely difficult decision to prefer charges in two cases. I think that I was justified. I also think that the Secretary of the Navy’s action was justified. We each served our proper function in this.

From what I have said here today, I think you can realize that as we prison leaders developed this organization, this unity, this mutual trust and confidence, this loyalty that permitted us to ask a guy to give his all sometimes, we acquired a couple of things. We acquired a lot of close friends, but in addition we acquired constituency. Now, life has to make sense to that constituency. And that constituency comes home and says to itself: You spoke with force of law, and at great personal pain and inconvenience I obeyed that law, and now I come home and no one seems interested in whether everybody obeyed it, or not.

What kind of a deal is that? This is not a personal grudge thing at all. I hope you all understand that.

I’m too closely involved to be objective on some of these issues. I’m often asked how I feel about amnesty. It is a complicated question; I appreciate and understand it. Thank

goodness I'm not going to have to decide it. I don't resent amnesty—not personally—I simply don't have a position on the subject.

A couple of final comments: Self-discipline was vital to self-respect, which in turn is vital to survival and meaningful participation in a POW organization. Self-indulgence is fatal. Daily ritual seems essential to mental and spiritual health. I would do 400 pushups a day, even when I had leg irons on, and would feel guilty when I failed to do them. This ritual paid valuable dividends in self-respect, and, incidentally, I learned yesterday at the Mayo Clinic that it also paid physical dividends.

I thank God for the other Americans I was imprisoned with. The respect one develops for others in a POW situation is really indescribable. I think it might be best illustrated with a story of something that happened once when I was in solitary and under extremely close surveillance. I was in dire need of a morale boost when two other POWs, Dave Hatcher and Jerry Coffee, sent me a note at great risk to themselves. I opened it and found written the complete poem, "Invictus."

Out of the night that covers me,  
                   Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
 I thank whatever gods may be  
                   For my unconquerable soul.

In our effort to survive and return with honor, we drew on the totality of our American heritage. We hope we added something to that heritage. God forbid that it should ever happen to other Americans—to your sons and grandsons and mine—but if it does, we hope our experience will help to guide them and will give them the heart and hope they will need.

## **“A Society of Fighting Fools and Thinking Cowards,” October 1981**

*Army Times*, 26 October 1981

Stockdale discusses the establishment of the all-volunteer force in the military and the use of education benefits and other incentives to entice recruits. To this approach of “What’s in it for me?” he provides recruiters with some alternative approaches.

# A SOCIETY OF FIGHTING FOOLS AND THINKING COWARDS

The nation that will insist on drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting man and the thinking man is liable to find its fighting done by fools and its thinking done by cowards.

Sir William Francis Butler

With the advent of the All-Volunteer Force, the armed services entered into a high-rolling game of barter and exchange for the cream of this nation's youth, banking on the supposition that they could compete with the civilian job market in attracting and retaining the highest-caliber talent. However, with the military recruitment process now underpinned by a marketplace business ethic, the true meaning of service somehow got left out of the equation.

That a program that relies on enticements such as choice of duty station, delayed entry, the promise of specialized training, educational credits, and higher salaries should automatically accrue those drives that have kept this nation free for the past 200 years—namely, “duty, honor, and country”—has never tracked. The businesslike style of our recruiting has affected the outlook and perspective of both potential recruits and those already serving; for many, time in the armed services is simply another job. The Madison Avenue mentality is aiming us toward that bifurcated society of fighting fools and thinking cowards.

Yet history has shown that mercenaries do not win wars or maintain deterrence. People committed to their country and bound by a common duty do so. An injection of the nonquantifiable factors that encourage people to serve in the military is overdue, regardless of the future of the All-Volunteer Force.

Why won't Uncle Sam's enticement system work? Because the application of rational business concepts to the profession of arms runs contrary to the nature of war; rejects the strong probability of future war; ignores the fact that people, not machines or computers, will win future wars; and disregards the historic promise of freedom on which this nation was founded. The clear and simple rational model never captures the scope of human predicament. Alfred North Whitehead was right when he said, “There is a danger in clarity, the danger of overlooking the subtleties of truth.”

Adapting the business approach to the military profession has serious drawbacks—too many in uniform have caught the trendy habit of looking out for No. 1, of asking “What’s in it for me?” This type of self-centered careerism may be *de rigueur* on Wall Street but is the antithesis of the service ethic. War is a unique human enterprise that cannot be managed on the margin the way bureaucrats haggle over budget apportionments. The fact that all but 268 years in the past 4,000 have seen this planet enduring the blight of war is a grim reminder that Vietnam was not an inoculation that would free us from future conflicts, any more than was the “war to end all wars” more than a temporary placebo.

For those who believe that we’ve seen our last war, I commend that application of the logic of the 17th-century philosopher Blaise Pascal, who advised that in matters of great import, one should choose that outcome by which he’d stand to lose the least in case he’s wrong. I don’t think that it’s too whimsical or too insensitive to apply Pascal’s logic to the prime dilemma of our age—the occurrence or nonoccurrence of global war in the next decade or two. I think Pascal would agree that the smart wager is that some sort of global conflict will occur.

Despite the *Star Wars* technology of our weapons systems, the next war will be won by people. Sure, they will have very sophisticated arms, computers, and the like, but I’m confident that there will be many times when victory or defeat will rest on the ability of the commander on scene to lead, motivate, and inspire. I came home from Hanoi after years of listening to sophisticated weaponry pop and crackle in the big world outside the prison, convinced that it is not lasers but bayonets that will determine the course of history for years to come. I fear that our frenetic efforts to man the services fail to recognize this possibility. What our military needs is men and women whose sense of honor allows them to make do with less, and whose sense of country transcends ethnic or family allegiance. Just how can these people be attracted to the military when service demand requires not only meeting standards far above those of the common citizenry but also long hours, frequent separation, financial hardship, and little recognition?

- First, by telling it like it is. Make it clear that there is a very real possibility that there will be combat, perhaps in a foreign country with which we have no clear ties. People, civilian as well as military, may be wounded or killed. Prisoners will likely be isolated and tortured. Moreover, when the chips are down there can be no more carrot and stick—no enticements, no perquisites, no easy way to opt out. Our warriors must rely on themselves and their fellow Americans. Looking out for No. 1 loses its validity very quickly when everyone is looking over the precipice, staring at the bottom of the barrel, together.
- Second, by appealing to that better man or woman who lives inside every person. Low-order enticements are short term and cannot match the higher-order commitment to duty and country. Contemplation during my years in solitary confinement led me to conclude that a good life is one that accumulates high-quality memories. Can memories of comfort and a workaday life, even a workaday life spiced with financial coups, compete with memories of bold strokes of service which one knows in his gut really mattered in the course of history? For what,

in his old age, would one trade his lifetime memories of uplifting comradeship in times of shared danger? For what, in his old age, would one trade that flush of comfort in knowing that he has paid his dues as he listens to the band strike up the National Anthem?

- Third, by underscoring the historic roots of this nation's freedom. We've fought wars around the globe in freedom's name and have paid a terrible price for our most-fundamental national belief. All must be clear on the fact that those in uniform may someday sacrifice their lives for this country and the freedom for which it stands.

The long-term health of our nation depends to a great extent on the ability of our armed forces. Those in uniform are the ones who guard the passes and protect the ramparts. Let's not stoop to marketplace tactics to fill our ranks. We owe to those who will don American military uniforms the untainted pride of service to their nation and the respect of a thankful citizenry.

## **President's Notes: Firing Line, Winter 1978**

*Naval War College Review* 30, no. 3 (Winter 1978), pp. 1–2

Stockdale titled his Winter 1978 lead column for the *Naval War College Review* Firing Line (instead of the usual Taking Stock). In it he explicitly restates the intent of the quarterly publication and sets the tone for a discourse of sharing new ideas, challenging assumptions, and sparking scholarly debate. Stockdale brings a *Nicomachean Ethics* approach to bear, critiquing articles about multipolar alliances, the Code of Conduct, and the need for legally backed prisoner-of-war senior command authority.

## FIRING LINE

I was both surprised and pleased during my first week as President of the Naval War College to have had so many of those well-wishers who stopped in or phoned include in their remarks comments on the *Naval War College Review*. Many friends—active and retired officers, congressmen, educators, and others—closed our conversations with “keep the *Review* coming.” Not all its articles escape critical comment, but that is hardly surprising. This quarterly publication is not a house organ, cranking out a particular party line, but a scholarly journal intended to stimulate and challenge its readers and to serve as a catalyst for new ideas.

I disagree with both the thrust and conclusions of some of the *Review*’s articles myself, but my opinions do not necessarily detract from the value of those compositions. For instance, in this issue I take exception to Professor Hitchens’s writing on the Code of Conduct. The subject is, of course, very close to me, and I have read countless articles about, and heard many proposals for, revising the Code. His is what I might call the “outsider’s” viewpoint; shared by many, it focuses on Article V (“I am bound to give only name, rank, service number, and date of birth”) as a flawed stipulation requiring revision. It has been my observation that those who have not served as prisoners of war but who write on such matters invariably assume that Article V is the “heart” of the Code. My further observation is that few of those who have been prisoners of war for a significant period of time have any trouble understanding or dealing with it. The article is just a piece of good advice: to utter as little as possible except for the four items required under international law, at least until one is sufficiently certain of his ground to be able to use his words as weapons against his captors. That’s what Brig. Gen. S. L. A. Marshall meant when he wrote it, and that’s what it says.

If Article V was flawed, it was given clearer meaning in a Presidential Executive Order signed in November 1977. However, scarcely noted by commentators, a second, more-important Executive Order was also signed at that time. That one dealt with Code provisions that have great significance for “insiders”; it dealt with command authority within a prison camp. The Code says that if one is senior he will take command and that, if not senior, he will obey the orders of the senior prisoner and back him up in every way. The shocking discovery for us who returned from North Vietnam was to be told that the Code did not have the force of law. Had this fact been generally known in

prison I'm afraid our PW military organizations would have been much less effective. Now that "the cat is out of the bag," President Carter's new Executive Order should go far toward remedying what could have been a serious problem in the next war. As for Professor Hitchens's question: "Is the Code of Conduct required at all?," I believe that the answer is "no" for about 60 percent of the American fighting men. However, some of us need its moral support to hitch up our courage, and a few of us need a little fear of the law to keep it hitched up.

Institutional nepotism aside, I thought Captain Platte's multipolarity article was the finest in this issue. However, he isn't immune from disagreement either. He believes the U.S.S.R. best suited by experience to play the "balancer" in a tripolar world. I would argue that China is equally experienced. The Chinese Communists' World War II performance in fighting two enemies simultaneously, alternately siding with each against the other, must have set a record for aplomb and agility. At any rate, they certainly smoked the true nature of their conflicts by the man on the street in the United States. Americans, Captain Platte and I agree, will have the least affinity for three-cornered confrontations. Visualizing all the bad guys on one side and all the good guys on the other will never get us by.

I don't intend these notes merely to be a rebuttal or even a comment on every article. Rather, I intend to use this space as a sounding board to float a few ideas of my own.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle, differing with his teacher Plato, held that although both are dear to us, piety requires that we honor truth even before our friends. I address this to my friends the strategists, the analysts, and the tacticians. The truth to be honored is that your analyses, your equations, your principles, and your plans too often are based on incomplete if not erroneous assumptions about the nature of man and the nature of war. The extension of rational management principles to planning and waging a war is obviously not without value. Indeed, to ignore those tools is crippling and criminally dangerous. Equally dangerous, however, is the belief that the uncritical application of those principles will bring victory in war. War is an irrational undertaking and there are no tenets of rationality to which all men subscribe. We may cry with Job, "Oh that mine adversary had written a book," but he hasn't, and yet we err in ascribing our own values, reactions, cultural processes, etc., to him. This "mirror imaging" is often warned against but as often forgotten. It is a blind spot or, perhaps more properly, a false view, a mirage, that we must rid ourselves of. We must do it nationally, and we are going to do it in our courses of instruction here at the War College. In a future issue of the *Review* I wish to look into some specific aspects of this subject.

In the first article of this issue, the Honorable Edward Hidalgo warns that striving to avoid error is not the same thing as seeking the attainment of a positive goal—that avoiding failure is not success. I intend that my term as President of the Naval War College be devoted to the quest for the positive goal, but that will require good judgment. It has been said that good judgment is based on experience, but that, unfortunately, good experience is based on bad judgment. Once upon a time I ziggged when I should have zagged. At any rate—

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfills himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. B. Stockdale', written in a cursive style.

J. B. STOCKDALE  
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy  
President, Naval War College

## President's Notes: Taking Stock, Fall 1978

*Naval War College Review* 31, no. 2 (Fall 1978), pp. 1–2

During his tenure as President of the Naval War College, Stockdale authored a lead column in each issue of the *Naval War College Review*, a journal with a broad national security audience. In this seminal Taking Stock from the fall of 1978, Stockdale agrees with author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who recently had delivered a Harvard University commencement address (“A World Split Apart”) that became famous. Stockdale and Solzhenitsyn both argued against the abrogation of personal ethics, common sense, and moral obligation in favor of blind legal obedience to regulations. In espousing a “gaze fixed on the high-minded principles standing above the law: Duty, Honor, Country,” Stockdale advises that officers rediscover the values and lessons of classical writings, including those of Aristotle and others in the Greek rationalistic tradition.



Source: U.S. Naval War College photo / NWC Archives

## TAKING STOCK

Press reaction to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Harvard address last spring was extraordinary. Editorial comment was voluminous, frequently registered surprise at what one would assume were his well-known viewpoints, and seemed to avoid his major thrusts. In particular, most writers missed or ignored his principal premise, one common to almost all the Solzhenitsyn titles which have lined American library shelves for the past fifteen years, and one with which I agree. While not wanting to use the *Naval War College Review* as a forum for debating whether Solzhenitsyn is on target or not, I believe his concept of the insidiousness of creeping legalism is relevant to our fighting forces and bears investigation. The mutation of ethics in a legalistic society is a very thought-provoking subject and it strikes me as odd that the editorial writers of this country bypassed it. For me, the problem boils down to displacement of personal responsibility by law in what has become an essentially litigious society, where moral goodness is defined as conformity to specified rules of conduct and where personal virtue or righteousness is considered synonymous with a mechanical disposition to submit consistently to those rules.

The flagrant, excessive use of laws, courts, regulations, and the growing penchant for directing society's course by a myriad of rules has largely and sadly depreciated the burden of moral responsibility. No longer are individuals expected to make determinations of right or wrong. Now they can justify nearly every action by some rule, some technicality, either written or conceived for the appeals process. The product of this "letter of the law" society is measured on the legal-versus-illegal scale, with the good-versus-bad scale only rarely being applied, more often than not as a matter of convenience. Society as a whole has adopted the judicial process as its moral yardstick and forfeited common sense and personal responsibility. Legal is not necessarily synonymous with good.

This situation exists to a great extent in the U.S. military profession, in which too many officers are armed only with technical knowledge and a legalistic, by-the-numbers approach; this type of person proceeds through his career tripping over minutiae and substituting checkoff lists for common sense. Too many have become relativists without any defined moral orientation. Too many are content to align their value systems with fads and buzzwords, and mindlessly try to obey what amounts to a hodgepodge mixture of inconsistent slogans. Error avoidance and careerism are seen to take the place of positive achievement within our ranks.

What is to be done? If one looks at the West's cultural heritage, particularly at its roots in the classical writings, there seem to be several important guideposts designed to discourage what Solzhenitsyn calls a "letter of the law" mentality that "paralyzes men's noblest impulses." Aristotle frequently distinguished between the ethics of character and the ethics of acts by suggesting that society's main objective is to instill virtue in its citizenry, and that specific laws are a secondary concern. In fact, most philosophers of the classical Greek rationalistic tradition treated dispositions of character as primary and specific rules of conduct as secondary and derivative. We must realize that laws merely delineate a floor in our behavior, a minimum acceptable level of ethical standards, and that moral standards can and should be set on a higher plane. In the Naval Service we have no place for amoral gnomes lost in narrow orbits; we need to keep our gaze fixed on the high-minded principles standing above the law: Duty, Honor, Country.

A meaning to life can only be gained through an intuitive sense of good and bad and their attendant comparatives (worse, worst; better, best). It does not obtain directly from systems of laws emanating either from the legislative or the judiciary side, and can be positively strangled by the real culprit in our national investment in moral bankruptcy—the delegation of lawmaking powers to the administrative bodies who work far from the "canons of ethics and decency." Such social regulation is the disease that Solzhenitsyn diagnoses as totally lacking an ethical base.

It is certainly convenient to adopt the mores of the bureaucracy and not take on the unpleasant and tedious task of formulating one's own. However, if anything has power to sustain an individual in peace or war, regardless of occupation, it is one's conviction and commitment to defined standards of right and wrong. Today's ranks are filled with officers who have been weaned on slogans and fads of the sort preached in the better business schools of the country—that is to say, that rational managerial concepts will cure all evils. The flaws of this viewpoint are brightly illuminated when it is applied to fighting forces—that's one of the things Vietnam proved. The loss of that war demonstrated that we cannot adopt the methodology of business without adopting its language, its style, its tactics, and, above all, its ethics. We must regain our bearings.

It is time to put the legal machinery in its proper place: to aid the people in maintaining order and seeking truth. However, regardless of the fairness of our judicial system, it must not be allowed to take the place of moral obligation to ourselves, to our Service, to our country. Each man must bring himself to some stage of ethical resolution. I hope this message will travel far beyond the walls of Mahan Hall where I will be expounding it this year.

The purpose of education is not to teach people what they do not know, but to teach them to behave as they do not behave.

John Ruskin



J. B. STOCKDALE

Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy  
President, Naval War College



## **President's Notes: Taking Stock, Winter 1979**

*Naval War College Review* 31, no. 3 (Winter 1979), pp. 1–2

Stockdale gives a primer on Aristotle, Plato, and the topic of courage. In the modern world of diplomacy and defense, officers are steeped in technical wisdom but need to balance that with courage in the face of fear—a moral excellence that Aristotle lauded as the “exemplary moral virtue” of the military man. The President of the Naval War College also discusses the role of education in gaining historical perspective and practicing the ability to handle failure.

## TAKING STOCK

Practical men tell us it's a good idea from time to time to check our assets against our liabilities. Today we are long on technical knowledge, short on courage. For light on hard topics like courage, I like to start with a ray of ancient wisdom.

Aristotle was a practical, hardnosed scholar and no-nonsense teacher. He wrote the first textbooks for a dozen academic disciplines, including physics, biology, logic, psychology, and political science. Although time has passed him by in some fields, a recent winner of a Nobel prize for genetic research said that the award should rightly go to the old master, from whose treatise on embryology he lifted some of his prize-winning ideas on sperm chemistry. Skeptics may chuckle about that, but in the area of moral philosophy Aristotle's preeminence endures. In the field of military ethics, Aristotle is one of the few writers who actually spells out the qualities that one rightly expects to find in the heart of a warrior, whether a fighting man of the 5th century B.C. or of World War III.

The exemplary moral virtue of a military man, says Aristotle, is courage. Because it is a moral virtue, involving feeling as well as reason, one achieves it by avoiding the pitfalls of excess (rashness) or defect (cowardice). In this way, Aristotle introduces his concept of moral excellence—the mean. The mean doesn't signify “moderate” or fence-sitting, but rather the center of a target, avoiding on the one hand gutlessness and on the other show-off irresponsibility. Endurance is a major component of the classical Greek concept of courage. Aristotle's teacher, Plato, defined courage as “endurance of the soul.” Although Greeks acknowledge the value of the single brave thrust or audacious dash, their hero was more often the man who “hung in there” when the going got tough. Both Plato and Aristotle specified that courage had to be exercised in the presence of fear. Aristotle described courage as the measure of a man's ability to handle fear.

A correlative of courage is the ability to deal with failure. Just as a military leader is expected to handle fear with courage, so also should we expect him to handle failure with emotional stability—another way of saying endurance of soul. I'm not talking about the leader being a “good loser”; I mean his ability to meet personal defeat with neither the defect of emotional paralysis and withdrawal nor the excess of lashing out at scapegoats or inventing escapist solutions. (Faced with monstrous ingratitude from his children, King Lear found solace in insanity. The German people, swamped with merciless economic hardships, sought solace in Adolf Hitler.)

Humans seem to have an inborn need to believe that in this universe a natural moral economy prevails by which evil is punished and virtue is rewarded. When it dawns on trusting souls that no such moral economy is operative in this life, some of them come unglued. Aristotle had a name for the Greek drama about “good men with a flaw who come to unjustified bad ends”—*tragedy*. The control of tragedy in this sense is the job of education. The only way I know how to handle failure is to gain historical perspective, to think about men who have successfully lived with failure in our religious and classical past. When we were in prison we remembered the Book of Ecclesiastes: “I returned, and saw . . . that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”

Today the statement that life is not fair has drawn ridicule. But it's true nevertheless. For that interpretation of a good man's defeat I prefer the original poem of the Book of Job—the way it was before some ancient revisionist historian spliced on a happy ending. The story of Job goes a long way in explaining the “Why me?” of failure. That God can allow evil to be visited upon upright and honest men is something we must be prepared to deal with.

How does one handle failure? One can develop or learn that special kind of courage that can prepare us for the occurrence of failure and diminish its worst effects. Historical perspective allows us to assess within the framework of the past the relative importance of injury and disappointment—even a misfortune that may seem cataclysmic and the end of the world. Measured historical perspective will allow an optimism of hard work to grow. That's my definition for a studied outlook born of knowing that failure is not the end of everything, that a man can always pick himself up off the canvas and fight one more round.



J. B. STOCKDALE

Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy  
President, Naval War College



## **President's Notes: Taking Stock, February 1979**

***Naval War College Review* 32, no. 1 (February 1979), pp. 1–2**

As President of the Naval War College, Stockdale increased the printing frequency of the *Naval War College Review* from quarterly to bimonthly, noting a marked increase in articles and publishable student papers. Therefore his fifth Taking Stock appeared in February 1979 rather than the spring, with the sixth installment in the March–April issue. His February letter critiques *Crisis in Command* by Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage (1978), agreeing with book reviewer Lewis Sorley regarding the weaknesses and strengths of the authors' analysis of the Vietnam War. Stockdale contends, "When the chips are down, and you're facing real uncertainty instead of that on a projected profit-and-loss sheet, you need something more than rationalist stuffing."

## TAKING STOCK

In my frantic rush to catch up on the eight years of American history that I missed, I am often appalled by the studied, analytic approach to warfare taken by so many of the educated, well-intentioned individuals who directed our war in Vietnam. If my understanding of their reasoning is to remain lacking, so much the better. For he who supports the position that warfare and warriors are just other things to which the rational concepts of business and economics apply is missing the mark. Lewis Sorley reviews *Crisis in Command* in the Professional Reading section of this *Review*, and I think his opening assessment of the book is accurate: the book is flawed. Gabriel and Savage's little volume has been condemned by many as an exaggerated indictment of American performance in Vietnam; many say it is hung on a questionable historic framework, and almost all its readers agree that its suggested reforms are reminiscent of the Dark Ages. Though acknowledging all of that, Sorley again hits the nail on the head when he adds: to dismiss this book for the above reasons, however, is to ignore the tremendous power of the authors' central thesis. That thesis is that American victory was impossible because our traditional fighting man's gladiatorial ethic had been programmed out of style and supplanted by an entrepreneurial ethic whose tools were based on the rational corporate model, systems analysis, and utils. This new fad assumed that management and leadership were synonymous. Natural outgrowths of that concept were officers' ticket punching, organizational "efficiency" at the expense of honor, and ultimately a breakdown of small-fighting-unit cohesion, spirit, and integrity.

Wars cannot be fought the same way bureaucrats haggle over apportionments. The toll of human life in battle does not lend itself to cost/benefit analysis. One's plan of action on the international chess board cannot be built on compromise businesslike decisions among factions. To design a country's strategy along a middle course for bureaucratic reasons is to aim at what Winston Churchill has called the bull's eye of disaster. That our country was steady on course for that bull's eye of disaster, even before I was shot down in September 1965, is evident from a reading of Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp's recent book *Strategy for Defeat*. By that time, the bureaucracy was already sending him, CINCPAC, waffled directives (consensus documents with "all factions inside the paper") that were not consistent with the stated military objectives of that same bureaucracy. The managerial authors of the war policy spoke self-assuredly in the language of war, but their mind-set continued to be that of faddish entrepreneurial gamemen; by the time they realized that the enemy was ignoring their finesses, it had long

been clear to those in the field that these gamesmen had no belly for a fight. With forces already committed, there was no place to go but down.

The style, ethics, and language of business are peculiar to that vocation. So too does war have its own style, ethics, and language. Adapting the business approach to the military profession has serious shortcomings; too many in uniform caught the habit of asking, "What's in it for me?" This type of self-centered careerism may be *de rigueur* on Wall Street but is the antithesis of *service* in the military. War is a unique human enterprise that cannot be managed on the margin. Clausewitz wrote: "War is a special profession, and however general its relation may be, and even if all the male population of a country capable of bearing arms were able to practice it, war would still continue to be different and separate from any other activity which occupies the life of man." Contrast this with a paragraph from a study done in 1974 entitled *U.S. Tactical Air Power*: "Waging war is no different in principle from any other resource transformation process and should be just as eligible for the improvements in proficiency that have accrued elsewhere from technological substitution." This is simply not true. There are men who in battle can realize proficiency that would be labeled "impossible" by any systems analyst, men who can make  $2 + 2 = 5$  time after time on the basis of their personal courage, leadership, strength, loyalty, and comradeship. When the chips are down, and you're facing real uncertainty instead of that on a projected profit-and-loss sheet, you need something more than rationalist stuffing. The first step is to acknowledge that fighting men resent being manipulated by carrot-and-stick enticements; they find no solace in being part of some systematic resource-transformation process when they're told to go in harm's way. In short, you can't program men to their deaths, they have to be led; and, as *Crisis in Command* points out, high risks and high casualty rates for senior officers are common elements of victory.

Thus, though I take issue with some of the assertions in *Crisis in Command*, I think it carries a strong message for leadership. Whether we're driving ships around the ocean or navigating a desk ashore, all of us in the military should continually contemplate that "different and separate activity which occupies the life of man." As we follow the peacetime horde down the prescribed track, let us not adopt the false sense of security that combat philosophies will be issued by "the system" when the need arises. The twists and turns of the fortunes of war have a way of throwing military men into new decision-making territory where all previous bets are off and no philosophic survival kits are available. Have you thought it through? When the whistle blows, are you ready to step out of your business suit with both the philosophy and the belly for a fight?



J. B. STOCKDALE

Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy  
President, Naval War College

P.S. The growing rate of submission of professionally written articles and the prospect of receipt of more War College student papers of publishable quality prompts the

immediate increase in our printing frequency from quarterly to bimonthly. Look for your next *Review* in May.

  
JBS

## **President's Notes: Taking Stock, March–April 1979**

*Naval War College Review* 32, no. 2 (March–April 1979), pp. 1–2

Having served the College as President for nearly two academic years, Stockdale presents the institution with an “academic report.” He elaborates on the educational philosophy undergirding the changes he has made to the school, in concert with the primary directive of General Order No. 325 in 1884: to provide military officers with a curriculum and procedures for the study of the profession of arms. Stockdale reviews the Naval War College programs of study; elaborates on the success of the electives program; and stresses the importance of his recently added elective course, Foundations of Moral Obligation, to inspire military leaders to the study and inculcation of combat virtues.

## TAKING STOCK

After nearly 2 academic years at the helm of this institution, I can appreciate the thoughtful and studied progress of its 95-year history and can understand the changes in style, curriculum, and focus that have evolved over time to support the original goal of studying the profession of arms. That goal remains our *raison d'être* and hasn't changed since General Order No. 325 was issued in 1884. As we shape our curriculum and procedures for the Class of 1980, I'd like to take the opportunity to review the bidding and to express some of the educational philosophy that underlies the changes I've made and determines the direction we're going.

Educating people to make sound decisions has never been a simple process, nor is designing the curriculum to do it. A realistic program of study must be uniformly rigorous yet encourage original thinking. It must include a survey of what's new in technology, tactics, and foreign affairs as well as foundation work in the immutable lessons of history. Four principal activities comprise our curriculum: the traditional prescribed courses in Strategy and Policy, Defense Economics, and Naval Operations, and the Electives program. The three prescribed courses are offered at both the senior and intermediate levels, with a distinct variation in focus that reflects prospective needs of future assignments.

We've made a conscious shift to war gaming in the Naval Operations course, and our students participate to an ever-increasing extent in major CINC-level games during the year. With the completion of our new facility in 1980, I see the trend continuing toward more and more gaming activity at all levels. The reputation of the Naval War College was built largely on the tremendous impact gaming had on World War II. As Nimitz later wrote, "The enemy of our games was always—Japan—and the courses were so thorough that after the start of WWII—nothing that happened in the Pacific was strange or unexpected."

The Electives program has been a most enlightening educational experiment, and for the Class of 1980 it will have equal status and credit weight with the prescribed courses. About 90 percent of our students are able to get their first choice of an array of 16 electives each trimester. The selections thus far have revealed a marked interest in area studies (Russia, China, Middle East), electronic warfare, and Soviet studies. I am of course delighted with the response to my Foundations of Moral Obligation, which I team-teach with Dr. Joseph Brennan, professor emeritus of philosophy at Columbia University. We

will offer that twice again next year. Additionally, the Naval War College will be privileged next spring trimester to have in residence Dr. Philip Rhinelander, professor emeritus of philosophy at Stanford University, where he was also Dean. My old friend Philip has additionally been director of general education at Harvard, and a Boston lawyer before that. He is now teaching philosophy of law at Stanford while writing a new book on law and morality that will be the text for a special elective course entitled *The Scope and Function of Morality* for the NWC Class of '80.

Philosophy is the logical discipline from which to draw insights and inspirations into military leadership in general and combat virtues in particular. In my view, trendy, psychological chitchat, case-study leadership courses usually wind up in a welter of relativism. In fact, current literature tells me that the social sciences as a whole are becoming committed to a veritable ideology of relativism, an "egalitarianism of ideas" via the route of a logical positivism that most philosophers have long since rejected. If one leads men into battle while committed to the idea that each empirically unverifiable value judgment is just as good as the next, he's in for trouble. Thus, I think offerings of a discipline whose founder (Socrates) was committed to the position that there *is* such a thing as central, objective truth, and that that which *is just* transcends self-interest, provide a sensible contrast to much of today's management and leadership literature.

A quality program is thus in store for this first class of the new decade, in each of the four parts of our curriculum. Throughout its preparation we in Newport will be guided by a historic precedent that has consistently emphasized process over perishable content, concentration over fragmentation, and education over training. We will continue to require that students read widely and critically, write extensively and analytically, and define their ideas forcefully and logically in graduate-level seminars.

The quality of the academic excellence of any institution is tied directly to the rigor of its curriculum. Grades are an important and necessary adjunct to this rigor. For the Class of 1980, I have made a departure from the traditional 4.0 grading system and have implemented a straightforward A, B, C format. However, grades will be considered privileged information, and they will not appear in any fitness or efficiency reports. In fact, they will be released from the College only on the request of the student who earned them; this is an important provision, particularly because Naval War College transcripts have become increasingly valuable for accreditation and admission to other institutions. (Each year our Registrar processes 150 transcript requests from our graduates.) To summarize my position on grades for the Class of '80, I am continuing to assume that they are an important form of communication between professor and student in our education process. But I do not want the process of grading to generate a rat race or result in a senseless competition that inhibits a mature officer's desire to concentrate study time on issues in which his interest is piqued. Subordination of our educational goals to the relentless logic of a measurement system based on weighted coefficients is *not* what is desired here. The provisions herein are designed to free all from any shackles save their desire to learn and thereby better serve their country.

I hope this "academic report" gives the alumni, friends, and particularly the inbound Class of 1980 a clear picture of what we're doing in Newport. I think of the academic year as an intellectual and philosophical "pit stop" that should give military officers a

fresh, positive frame of mind as they glance down the track at the second half of their careers. This is where the creativity and measured outlook gained (I hope) during their War College experience realize utility. We try to build the self-confidence our students will need to fashion that most important and productive part of their careers around their individual strengths. So, Class of 1980, we see our job as one of boosting you to a tall ship, and hope that in the process we may help you find a star to steer her by.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "J. B. Stockdale", with a stylized, cursive script.

J. B. STOCKDALE  
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy  
President, Naval War College

## **President's Notes: Taking Stock, May–June 1979**

*Naval War College Review* 32, no. 3 (May–June 1979), pp. 1–2

In this issue, Stockdale explores the tension between egalitarianism and excellence, arguing that a new “leveling of America” endangers war readiness, in that officers and citizens are racing toward the lowest common denominator and the resultant mediocrity. Stockdale advocates striving for excellence in personal performance, the Naval War College education, and other higher levels of learning, citing specific changes instituted by universities such as Harvard and Stanford. He reiterates his belief that a focus on the Greek classics—such as those studied in his seminal *Foundations of Moral Obligation* coursework—would help officers make and apply themselves to a commitment to excellence, preparing them to lead Americans in times of conflict as well as peace.

## TAKING STOCK

A few months ago, the *New York Times* carried an article entitled “The Leveling of America.” It was written by William Manchester, a faculty member of Wesleyan University and author of the recent biography of Douglas MacArthur, *American Caesar*. In this article Manchester lamented America’s preoccupation with idolizing equality and shunning any recognition of human excellence. He said we had all joined a gigantic cult of American egalitarianism, a cult that is a sort of secular religion, a religion worshipping human mediocrity, a religion that had become just as powerful and intolerant as 17th-century New England Puritanism. Manchester refers not to that social equality of access recognized as an American’s right, but rather to that equality that results when our humanness—our goals, achievements, personal standards, rewards—is reduced to the lowest common denominator. I share his view; the “Leveling of America” type of equality is evil and flies in the face of our national and even our Western heritage.

The American idolatry of self-depreciation, this reverence of a mediocre base, has been with us for about two generations. (Manchester found its beginnings in the immediate post-World War II period.) In our lifetimes the trends grew into a national fetish that confused equality with blurred distinctions between generations, sexes, classes, and achievements. The term “elitism” became a commonplace epithet used to scorn or berate any program advocating competitive excellence or even providing recognition for those who exceeded the norms of the group. In our schools it led to the sanctification of “relevance” (to be defined by the consumer, of course), and that became a capitulation to the shallow, to a new sophism in which the traditional academic pursuit of human knowledge was all but lost; credits were given for casual studies that didn’t qualify as disciplines; academic offerings resembled a smorgasbord menu instead of an ordered, coherent pattern of learning; academic rigor was trampled by the haste and barbarism of specialization. Equality manifested itself even in epistemology, in an “egalitarianism of ideas”; this led to an ideology of relativism that tolerated—even honored—a lack of discrimination in thought that opened the door to an undisciplined cant and to a political opportunism that horrified those of sober reflection as much as it would have horrified the classical Greeks.

In recent months, we have begun to see a turning away from all this, at least in the field of higher education. This is not to say that our society has not been blighted by the equality binge, but I rejoice in the fact that that blight is beginning to be stripped away

by a regenerative, stronger force. As Hegel would say, we are at that point of synthesis in the dialectical process; we are at the point of a pivotal swing in the trends of education. Harvard introduces its “core curriculum” this fall, abandoning the broad, general introductory courses and substituting a list of highly specific subjects that set tougher standards for graduation. Moreover, recent articles from the West Coast pacesetter, Stanford, have highlighted campus enthusiasm for a return to the classics and to a reconsideration of those timeless documents that really said it all—those guideposts that were sadly ignored by those seeking new solutions to new problems. In my view, new problems (if any problem really is new) should be candled against the light and wisdom of the classical thinkers who conceived the disciplines that mankind, over the centuries, has used profitably to solve them.

In Will and Ariel Durant’s *The Lessons of History* we read that freedom and equality are sworn and everlasting enemies and that when one prevails the other dies. That is a strong and unambiguous statement that will make some uneasy, but I believe it and see no way around it. Anything less would be like getting something for nothing—a violation of the second law of thermodynamics. It is true that in good times we seem to be able to get by with liberal doses of mediocrity born of equality, but in adversity we crave that excellence born of unfettered human freedom.

Freedom is necessary for excellence and discipline is necessary for freedom. Dedication to excellence through the entire range of behavior pays significant dividends in the good times and the bad, for the things we practice until they become habit form the foundations of character. Goethe once wrote that you limit a man’s potential by appealing to what he is; you must appeal to what he might be. Mediocrity should describe the lower limit of our behavior, not the norm. There are too few people in uniform today who are willing to apply themselves to the demands that a commitment to excellence entails; excellence is as necessary to the military man as armament, for without it you’re losing the battle before you’ve engaged the enemy.

The leveling of America had no biological roots; rather it was a self-inflicted wound. Similarly, the drive for excellence is born of the human will. The Durants noted that civilization is but a thin veneer on society, that we are but one generation removed from barbarism. In times ahead people will look to excellence, look to those who actively and faithfully preserve this precious thin veneer. They will hug to their breasts the kind of inspired excellence needed to hold order, coherence, and culture together. Many of those with that excellence will be in uniform. Complacency does not complement that uniform, nor does satisfaction with egalitarianism.



J. B. STOCKDALE

Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy  
President, Naval War College



## **President's Notes: Taking Stock, July–August 1979**

*Naval War College Review* 32, no. 4 (July–August 1979), pp. 1–3

In his final President's letter, Stockdale reflects on critical lessons drawn from his Foundations of Moral Obligation course that benefit Naval War College (NWC) leaders in the profession of arms. The traits officers need to meet future challenges arise from different disciplines, as leaders will need to be moralists who elucidate right and wrong, jurists with a sense of fairness, teachers who set a motivational climate, stewards who tend their flock, and philosophers who can cope with failure and tests of character. With these leadership and ethics tools in use, Stockdale envisions the continuation of an NWC mandate to prepare officers for leadership, survival, and moments of magnificence in the field in times of war and peace.

## TAKING STOCK

I don't believe anyone could read any of my articles of the past two years and reach the conclusion that systems analysts are my kind of guys. It may thus strike some readers as odd that I begin this final Taking Stock by advocating the application of the logic of the world's first systems analyst—the 17th-century mathematician and founder of modern probability theory, Blaise Pascal. His logic, in the matter of how to resolve issues of vast import, was not to apply the conventional wisdom of suspending judgment “until all the facts are in,” but to choose (“wager” was the word he used) that outcome by which one stands to lose the least in case he's wrong. I don't think it's too whimsical or too insensitive to apply Pascal's wager to the number one dilemma of our age: the occurrence or nonoccurrence of global war in the decade or two ahead. I think Pascal would agree that the smart wager is that global war will occur.

To me, this wager is more than a fail-safe precaution; all the trends are tracking steadily in the direction of that outcome. Destabilization is in the wind and it seems an inevitable fallout of every political viewpoint. The liberal press feeds us a daily fare of what they perceive as the destabilizing influence of hawkish policies. What about dovish policies? Even the liberal *New Republic* is publishing articles that make a case for the destabilizing effects of them. A recent issue featured an article describing the deep lament of Moscow intellectuals who fear that the Kremlin's perception of American indecision and weakness will result in Soviet provocation, in the reckless pressing of their advantage. These intellectuals were described not as dissidents but as scholars and coffeehouse skeptics who are conscious of their government's cynicism and incredulous of an America on which they depended to keep the power balance stabilized, an America too sensitive to sideline heckling and so fickle and fainthearted as to drop the ball game in Vietnam and elsewhere. They don't understand us and are dismayed at the probable destabilizing results of our growing reputation for caving in.

Given the political fact that wars and rumors of wars can be made to follow from the logical extension of either hard- or soft-line policies, and the historic fact that war has blighted this planet in all but 268 of the past 4,000 years, I think it was reasonable that while speaking recently in Annapolis I advised the midshipmen not to waste emotional energy on the twists and turns of every current event, “but to rest their nervous systems and gird their loins for World War III.” Said another way, “put your money on the

number dictated by Pascal's logic and concentrate on acquiring the traits you will need to meet the tests ahead."

A fallout of my philosophy course, Foundations of Moral Obligation, has been the illumination of some seldom-stressed aspects of leadership that may well be a part of those tests. I mean in particular those necessary in the new decision-making territory our middle- and junior-grade officers of today can expect to find themselves in before the turn of the century. The "new territory" might well be one of a nuclear war, one that lasts for months, one in which communication with deployed units may be intermittent or severed. There in the eye of the storm, leadership will entail many unique duties that will test and challenge. The ability of our leaders to function in such a do-it-yourself environment may influence the direction as well as the outcome of the battle, or perhaps the war.

To lead, they will face the need to be moralists, not as those who sententiously exhort men to be good, but those who elucidate what the good is. This requires first and foremost a clear idea of right and wrong. A disciplined military life will encourage a commitment to a personal code of conduct, and from good habits a strength of character and resolve will grow. This is the solid foundation from which the good is elucidated—by action, by example, and by tradition. A moralist can make conscious what lies unconscious among his followers, lifting them out of their everyday selves into their better selves. All great men in history have relied on some measure of ethical resolution in their lives, and it's been perfected in their work and heritage.

Secondly, there are times when our leaders must be jurists, when decisions will be based solely on their own ideas of fairness, their knowledge of the people who will be affected, and their strength of character. There won't be a textbook or school solution to go by. I'm not talking about petty, legalistic arbitrations or controls but about hard decisions with seemingly endless complications. As jurists, they will be writing law, and that's a weighty responsibility. When they're in the hot seat, they'll need the courage to withstand the inclination to duck a problem or hand it off; they've got to realize that it's necessary to take it head on. And they must understand the peril of that fatal flaw of writing a law that cannot be obeyed.

Leaders will discover that part of their duty will involve teaching. Every great leader I've known has been a great teacher, able to give those around him a sense of perspective and to set the moral, social, and particularly the motivational climate among them. This is not an easy task—it takes wisdom and discipline and requires both the sensitivity to perceive philosophic disarray in your charges and the knowledge to put things in order. I believe that a good starting point is to put some time in on that old injunction "Know thyself."

There are footsteps of greatness to follow in any of the Service branches. During a military career, there are opportunities to leave those same clear footprints for future generations to follow. In John Ruskin's words, such a process is "painful, continual, and difficult . . . to be done by kindness, by watching, by warning, by precept, and by praise, but above all, by example." Teachership (in my view) is indispensable to leadership and is an integral part of duty.

Another of those unique duties is that of being a steward. That requires tending the flock, even “washing their feet,” as well as cracking the whip; it takes compassion to realize that all men are not products of the same mold. There is much more to stewardship than the carrot-and-stick enticements that some of our vaunted motivational experts would prescribe. It requires knowledge and character and heart to boost others up and show them the way. The old Civil War historian Douglas Southall Freeman described his formula for stewardship here at the Naval War College 30 years ago; he said you had to know your stuff, to be a man, and thirdly, to take care of your men. That’s a good formula to follow in the times ahead that will test stewardship.

One final aspect of leadership is the frequent necessity to be a philosopher, able to understand and to explain the lack of a moral economy in this universe, for many people have a great deal of difficulty with the fact that virtue is not always rewarded nor is evil always punished. To handle tragedy may indeed be the mark of an educated man, for one of the principal goals of education is to prepare us for failure. To say that is not to encourage resignation to the whims of fate, but to acknowledge the need for forethought about how to cope with undeserved reverses. It’s important that our leadership steel themselves against the natural reaction of lashing out or withdrawing when it happens. The test of character is not “hanging in there” when the light at the end of the tunnel is expected, but performance of duty and persistence of example when the situation rules out the possibility of the light ever coming.

Finally, I think it is clear that in my view, education prepares men for leadership and survival. For the record, I am convinced that formal education is now more important than ever for those of us in uniform. Certainly we can all see clearly the side of Pascal’s wager on which the Soviets come down. As revealed in a recent book, *The Armed Forces of the USSR* (written by an American military couple well acquainted with Moscow), Soviet officer education takes a top priority in professional development, and the courses are continually being lengthened and made more rigorous. Today, a Soviet officer cannot be assigned command of an army brigade or higher, or command of a naval second-rank ship or higher, unless he has had the “rough equivalent” of our Postgraduate School or War College. I say “rough equivalent” because their course lengths are longer. Their shortest war college (the General Staff Academy) is a two-year course; the shortest technical PG is three years, most are four, and some are five. Moreover, entrance to these “academies” is gained only through competitive examination, for which junior officers in their late twenties spend thousands of hours preparing.

The future will test this nation’s leadership, its resourcefulness, its imagination, its dedication, its creativity, and its will. To bring the point closer to home, it will probably give several of our midcareer officers of today *one* (and if they’re lucky, two) chances for a moment of magnificence. May they all be preparing themselves for that moment. May they never sell themselves short.



J. B. STOCKDALE

Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy  
President, Naval War College



## **Section 3**

### **Correspondence**

## **Letter to James D. Watkins, 14 December 1977**

In this letter, Stockdale writes to his friend and colleague then–Vice Adm. James D. Watkins, USN (future Chief of Naval Operations, 1982–86), discussing faculty and student composition at the Naval War College and Stockdale’s desire to increase the military quality of both groups. He also argues that there is no evidence that students with science and engineering backgrounds perform worse at the Naval War College than those with humanities or liberal arts backgrounds.



PRESIDENT OF THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, Rhode Island  
02840

Wed 14 December  
1977

Dear Jim,

The purpose of this note is to invite your attention to a couple of War College issues I know to be of concern to you. I'll just hit the high points herein; I'm prepared to give you or your staff more details, in more formal form, on request.

The first issue is the expanding and improving course in Naval Operations (Tactics) - specifically the faculty therefore. It has become commonplace over the years for us to replenish our military faculty from within the senior class - and Chuck Hathaway has made the reasonable suggestion that we limit our nominations to that source again this year. Tom Weschler is not continuing the previous practices of lining up tactics instructors, counting off, and letting ASW instruction fall to Army colonels, etc. Knowing that the SINE QUA NON of a first class operations course is a credible, experienced, recognized tactical operator up front, he's looking for leading warfare specialists - and guess what: we have none outside the 1110 community. I know our class input cut-bottomed out at about the 40 percentile - is now free of dregs (thank God). We also know it's devoid of nuclear submariners. What I did not know until I looked

into this case is that it's almost devoid of first team aviators/NFO's. Of the 25 of 'em in the senior class, only 4 have commanded carrier-based jet outfits. (The most prevalent backgrounds are low-screevers who got Trainee Command Seminars - Plus FODs, VCs, Helos, you name it). We need a carrier-based ASW professor, and have a choice between two S-2F jocks who have never been near the S-3 - and are thus at least a generation behind. We do have 3 fighter pilots (representing 2% of our dominantly non-war senior class); one has been told he's going to get the F-4 RAC in Oceana, and neither of the other two are proper representatives of the fighter world in Newport. We are also losing our carrier jet attack professor - and the selection base for his replacement is zero - NO A-4/A-7/A-6 drivers in the senior course at the war college. From a detailing viewpoint, it appears to me that the first team gets their choice of shore duty billets - and that the tag-alones get drafted to Newport. I am thus asking - in the short run - for three qualified senior aviators.

In the long run, the "new look" that I think we both seek here, deserves a more stable input <sup>of</sup> seniority members who are recognized, top, practical, operators. Back in 1969 Admiral Colbert recognized this need by setting up - with CNP support - the Military Chimes program. This gave the three-stars on the E-Rive a "man in Newport" who looked out for their interests. The system stagnated from lack of attention after Admiral Colbert departed. The Chimes, all named after famous naval leaders, were filled by nominees of OS (Strike Warfare), O94 (Electronic Warfare), O3 (Surface Strike Warfare), O4 (Logistics), O2 (Submarine Warfare), etc. etc. The current CO of Eisenhower once held the OS chair. We have nobody like that here now. Let's crank this up. I'll flood you with

Attention not details in Newport.



PRESIDENT OF THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, Rhode Island  
02840

As A Separate matter - for whatever use  
You can make of it, our study of Naval  
War College statistics of student performance  
and grades yields NO evidence that those  
with science/engineering educational backgrounds,  
undergraduate or graduate, score any lower in  
our course of instruction than those with  
liberal arts/humanities educational backgrounds,  
undergraduate or graduate. E.g. in A typical  
class, overall grades for the course of all Navy  
students averaged 3.56; those with technical  
degrees averaged 3.57; the remainder 3.55 -- Too  
close to be significant. Closer examination of both  
the star men and the buckets provided no conflicting  
information; the educational major does NOT affect the  
way an officer performs in our course. Best regards,  
*Jim Stadelink*

## **Letter to George H. W. Bush, 3 January 1978**

Between 1977 and 1981, George H. W. Bush, future vice president and president of the United States, served in several capacities outside government service. In this January 1978 letter, Stockdale writes to Bush asking him to come to the College to speak during the 1978–79 academic year. Although the speaking engagement never materialized, the correspondence between the two leaders is very interesting.



PRESIDENT OF THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, Rhode Island  
02840

3 January 1978

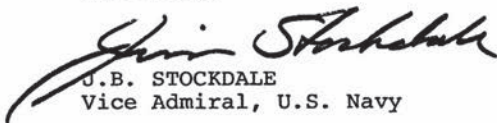
Dear George,

Each year the Naval War College holds a series of lectures designed to expose our 400 students, plus the faculty, staff and their wives to a broad range of cultural topics in the various fields of the arts and sciences not covered in the curriculum. These evening affairs are also open to interested people from the local Newport community. Lectures in our Contemporary Civilization series are given about once a month by persons of note in their particular field.

Would you be interested in delivering one of the lectures during our 1978-79 Academic Year? We can offer you a modest honorarium, travel expenses, and the use of our Constellation Guest Cabin, a pleasant two bedroom apartment overlooking Narragansett Bay, during your visit here. (It would be a great place for you and Barbara to spend a couple of days relaxing.) Our Spruance Auditorium seats up to 1100 people and offers a full range of audio-visual equipment to support your presentation.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope you may be able to join us in the future.

Sincerely,

  
J.B. STOCKDALE  
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy

The Honorable George H.W. Bush  
5161 Palisade Land, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20016

Enclosure: NWC Brochure

*Old newspaper Micky King  
called on me yesterday  
He has fond memories  
of you - As do S.G. /  
and I.*

## **Letter from George H. W. Bush, 7 January 1978**

President George H. W. Bush was known as a prolific letter writer, and in this correspondence with Stockdale we see an example of his warm and friendly style.

GEORGE BUSH  
FIRST INTERNATIONAL BANK BUILDING  
P. O. Box 2555  
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77001

January 7

Dear Jim,

I'd love to do it!

Shoot me some dates, and I'll try to set it up. I am travelling an awful lot. I do get to New England some.

It was great hearing from you.

Love to Sybil.

Hastily self typed by your friend,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'G. Bush', with a long, sweeping diagonal stroke extending from the bottom of the signature.

## **Letter to Richard T. “Dick” Burrell, 20 February 1978**

In this letter to his friend Dick Burrell, a Marine Corps officer who fought at the Battle of Iwo Jima, Admiral Stockdale writes of his plans to teach the elective course Foundations of Moral Obligation, and also mentions prominent persons he is seeking to have speak at the Naval War College.



PRESIDENT OF THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, Rhode Island  
02840

Feb 20th, 1978

Dear Dick,

Things are starting to roll on my elective course which I plan to teach next fall. An Emeritus philosophy professor from Barnard/Columbia is helping me get organized (See enclosed sheets with your name in red). I'm not making this into public yet - I'm going to surprise the Navy and put it in our catalog before complaints about "ivory towerism" or "impracticality" arise. Hell, I'll be giving the lectures - they can bet I'll salt 'em with plenty of practical applications.

I'm looking forward to a visit from Phil Rhinelander this spring. I would like to write a contract with

him for a term in residence here.

I've read Solzhenitsyn - and I've now  
 found a proposed letter to him which  
 Dick Starn might be so kind as to translate  
 and send. If you would prefer that I  
 go directly to Dick, please just say so.  
 Also, I'll be glad to modify the letter if  
 he thinks it's in poor form. (If Solzhenitsyn  
 wants big cash, I'll go to our Naval War  
 College Foundation for it. This private group  
 is kicking in \$3000 for a Henry Kissinger  
 speech here March 8th, and I think they  
 would do as well for Alexander, if asked.)  
 If you consider it appropriate, this blue  
 book might be forwarded to Alexander to give  
 him an idea of the War College layout and profile.

I'm loving my job and gaining momentum  
 all the way. I'll have an article in the April  
 Atlantic Monthly - part of which you'll recognize.

Hope to see you soon.  
 Tell Paul I'll see him here in March.

Sincerely,  




## **Letter to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 20 February 1978**

In this letter to Solzhenitsyn, the famous Soviet author and dissident, Stockdale invites him to speak at the Naval War College. He also tells Solzhenitsyn of his identification with the experiences of prisoners in the conditions of the Soviet gulag.



PRESIDENT OF THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, Rhode Island  
02840

Feb 20, 1978

DEAR MR. Solzhenitsyn,

I Read your books with great Empathy, for I have spent many days of my life in a manner very similar to those you describe in the life of Ivan Denisovich. I was the senior American Naval Officer in the prison camp system of Hanoi for nearly eight years.

I Am now, five years after my release, the President of the Naval War College at Newport, the oldest war college in America. It would be the most proud moment in this college's existence - since its founding in 1804 - if you would come to our campus and address our students and faculty. We have About 300 American

Students - professional Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine officers of Ages between 35 and 45, with Ranks from Major through Colonel. We also have an enrollment of about 75 Allied officers.

I can provide privacy, military security, transportation (we're not far from you), quarters, and an honorarium, of course. I can bar the Newport townspeople from your speech, or invite them as you desire; I can arrange to have you talk to American students only, or to the entire student body. In Summary, for all practical purposes I can totally control the social environment in accordance with your wishes.

Most of all, I want to personally shake your hand and have you as a guest in my quarters. Will you please consider coming to Newport, Sir?

Very respectfully,

James B. Stockdale  
Vice Admiral US Navy



## **Letter to Henry Kissinger, 10 March 1978**

Admiral Stockdale and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had very different experiences of the Vietnam War, but through it their lives were intertwined inextricably. In this very personal letter, Stockdale follows up on Kissinger's presentation at the Naval War College and proposes dissemination of the videotape of Kissinger's talk. He also writes of the enjoyment his wife, Sybil, took in the talk and visit.



PRESIDENT OF THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, Rhode Island  
02840

Friday March 10th  
1978

Dear Dr. Kissinger,

I Asked our most experienced professor, A Skeptic who has been here for about ten years, for an overall evaluation of the Wednesday night Affair. He said "I've Attended A lot of 'Em, And on the basis of overall impact and audience comments since the lecture, on a scale from 0 to 4.0, I rate it '4.1.'" That's the way we all feel, And I fully expect to look back on your visit as the highlight of my tour up here. I also particularly enjoyed your comments at breakfast - And I thank you for giving your time to those four TEENAGERS at the table who will someday tell their children about it.

As soon as I got back from dropping you off at the airport I heard about that snide remark about a "kick FEE" that that Guy Koch stuck in his Providence Journal Article (this AM edition). I was composing a short

PRESS Release to set the record straight when your office called suggesting same. Its contents got in the Providence Evening Bulletin Thursday (i.e. the Afternoon edition of the offending morning paper - same publishing Co.), in the daily Newport paper (which comes out in mid-Afternoon), And After a fashion, in the Friday AM Providence Journal. One never wins on these things, But the record is now straight. I know of no newspaper coverage outside these two papers, which were the only papers to have representatives in the audience. Koch was new to my public Affairs office - A Substitute for the Regular man who was ill - And I intend to tell his publisher, Mr. John C. A. Watkins, what I think of his reporting.

In hindsight, when a famous person speaks, I think it should either be closed to the press or given a lot of publicity. In this case, inviting a couple of Supposedly discreet Journalists to come in black tie & As normal Guests, may have been the worst of All Solutions.

Yesterday I found out that my crew made a video tape of the entire program, this was the first time it had ever been

done, and I'm told it is of good quality (in color). As I told you, it's common knowledge among the media that we normally make audio tapes. Although I suppose they'll find out by one means or another in due course, the media does not yet know about our video tape.

What's on this tape is certainly good for the Navy, and for the country - and perhaps good for you. Shall we exploit it? My people tell me that there are several levels at which we can expose it. The most conservative is to private, "war college family" audiences - e.g. to the trustees of the Naval War College Foundation, to Seminars enrolled in War College off-campus classes, etc. At the second level of exposure are such "internal Navy" audiences as ships' crews at sea, training establishments, groups of officers assembled in the Pentagon, etc. Finally there are external possibilities, ranging from Navy League meetings, to Educational TV, to Commercial TV. At the latter end of this spectrum we get into such considerations as Royalties, etc.

What I am suggesting is that you might want to have one of your people look at the tape, and perhaps talk to our "Information" professionals in Washington. I talked to our Chief of Information, and he will gladly explain all the technical considerations. His name is Rear Admiral David M. Cooney, telephone 697-7391. I hope you will consent to some level of exposure, but I will await your determination.

Your visit really made the whole winter for Sybil. She is convinced that you must run for office and was on the verge of phoning your office for instructions as to how to proceed in campaigning for you. We are going to Illinois to dedicate a school this weekend, and she has just decided to "let it be known" whenever she is being recorded that you are needed in our government and should be encouraged to run.

I will send you the Atlantic Monthly when it comes out in about two weeks.

I enclose, from top to bottom, the offending article, our rebuttal release, and the three subsequent articles that incorporate the latter.

Sincerely,  




## **Letter to Thomas B. Hayward, 14 June 1979**

In this letter to Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Thomas B. Hayward, Stockdale discusses the timing of his retirement and comments approvingly on the selection of his successor (Rear Adm. Edward F. Welch Jr.). He also requests that Admiral Hayward be the speaker at the combined convocation and retirement ceremony.



PRESIDENT OF THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, Rhode Island  
02840

Thurs 14 June  
1979

Dear Tom,

It seems to me that the logical time for me to officially say good-bye to the Navy is at the convocation ceremony which launches the War College class of 1980 on their academic year. This is scheduled for August 22nd. At the same ceremony I would turn over the college to Ed Welch (who was a good choice, incidentally).

Would you honor us here in Newport on August 22nd by being the principal speaker?

Sincerely,

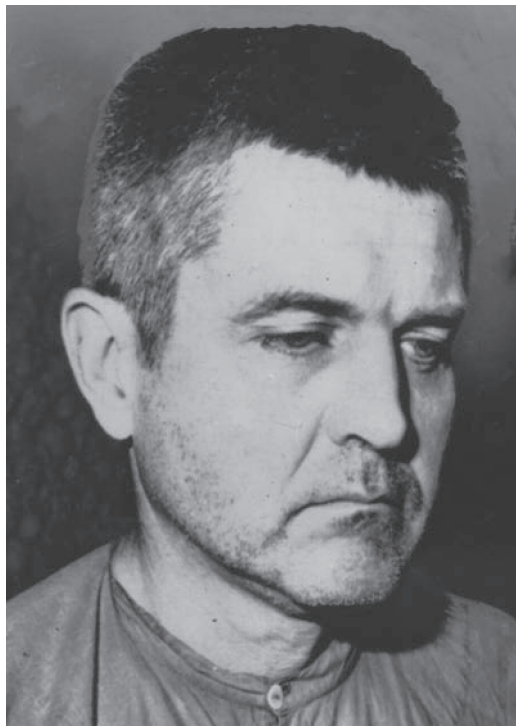


## **Section 4**

**Manuscript**

## **“Life of the Mind in Captivity” (Unpublished Manuscript), March 1988**

There are many memoirs by prisoners of war from many wars, including the Vietnam War. The majority of these writings focus on physical survival amid the brutality and deprivations of confinement. Rarer are accounts that stress the psychological, emotional, and spiritual aspects of confinement. One might think of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) or portions of Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946) as writings that focus on the internal as well as the external conditions of captivity for individuals. Stockdale's remarkable manuscript, written at Coronado and presented here in its unedited form, describes the survival of the mind and the human spirit. Stockdale argues that even in solitary confinement the mind can thrive and the resiliency of the human spirit can prevail.



**Source:** Department of Defense photo

# THE LIFE OF THE MIND IN CAPTIVITY

*James Bond Stockdale, Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)*

An eight-year prisoner of war has things to say to people who wonder about how they would handle life as a captive.

Captivity is an excuse for losing control of your circumstances, but not for losing control of your mind. Learn its unique quirks, how to calm it, how to harness its fire, how to get the best out of it, and it will bring you through.

JBS

*On the matter of common ground between author and ordinary citizens concerned about being precipitously captured:* Although early in the Vietnam War I was shot out of the sky as a naval aviator in a single-seat bomber, a uniformed combatant in an international armed conflict, I was never held as a prisoner of war. No Americans held in North Vietnam were afforded that protection. On parachuting to earth, I was overwhelmed by a civilian police force and taken to a civilian penitentiary. Physically helpless with a broken back and a broken leg, I was transported there in the back of a civilian truck, lying in a stretcher, covered by a tarpaulin to conceal me from public eye. For the first two months thereafter I was left in a back room of the penitentiary, unable to move, flat on my back on a large dilapidated table, unattended. When I became able to hold myself up on my feet and walk with the aid of crutches, I was put into an imprisonment regime the North Vietnamese described as their most severe, normally reserved for what they called their own “blackest criminals,” their *political* prisoners. Through my experiences in these circumstances, I believe I earned credentials to talk of coercive captivity—in almost all its current forms.

## Chapter 1: Get Your Head out of the Box

Do you remember the swimming pool scene at the Navy preflight school in the movie *An Officer and a Gentleman*? Richard Gere's class was being introduced to the "Dilbert Dunker." The Dilbert Dunker has for generations been the nickname of the U.S. Navy training device that provides fledgling naval aviators instruction in how to escape a crashed, flipped over, fighter-type airplane as it heads to the bottom of the sea. A mock cockpit, canopy open, student strapped in, accelerates down a steep track and into the pool, doing a forward half-somersault about the time the thing hits the water and starts sinking.

Before starting down that track, each flight student is well briefed on what to expect. The drill is to catch and hold your breath on water impact, let the cockpit come to a stop after it flips over, open your eyes, and positively actuate the handle that frees you from your seat and shoulder straps. You then breaststroke through the opening above your head (which in the upside down position you find yourself in is to swim toward the *bottom* of the pool), get yourself clear of the machine, and swim to the surface. It is a very simple logical evolution, which half the little tykes in the summer neighborhood swimming-pool set would perform effortlessly and naturally on the first try with only a brief and general explanation of how the thing worked before they got into it.

But some kids would get disoriented and panic, have trouble finding or operating the seat strap release handle in their upside-down position, forget which way was up, and drown unless life guards came to their assistance. And those who panicked would do so because of something in their natures completely separate from swimming ability, athletic coordination, or body power. In *An Officer and a Gentleman* the moviegoer saw this contrast when an intense, powerfully built, male preflight student required frantic action by the life guards to pull him out on his first try, while the rest of the class of ten or so, including more awkward and less physically fit types of *both* sexes, took the whole drill in stride as though there was nothing to it.

Something was different about the way the intense man dealt with the need to be cool and collected in boxed-in and somewhat disorienting circumstances. He panicked when his freedom of action was inhibited, the clock was ticking, and his life was at stake. He couldn't seem to work his mind right, to make it calmly set aside the urgency of his predicament and focus purposefully on performing the simple remedial actions it knew so well. This is not to say he would *always* panic when boxed in. And it certainly does not say that he could not learn to overcome this panic tendency by practice, introspection, and self-discipline. In fact, in the movie story, he clearly does learn to overcome it and is continued in flight training.

In such cases we are seldom privy to exactly what mental quirk the person recognized in his personality or what trick of mental adjustment he devised to overcome it. He might not be able to articulate his real hang-up or the corrective process, but even if he could he would likely prefer to keep it to himself. Those of us who have spent our lives untangling our mental knots to get through such tests know that sophistication being what it is among vigorous young people in competitive physical programs, it is not *de*

*rigueur* to talk about it after you have failed, learned to get control of yourself, and conquered problems that were easy for the majority to start with. Maybe it's just as well that everybody keeps certain categories of mental achievements to themselves and does not seek public approbation. After all, we all certainly have a category of motivations and private mental processes that are "up to each of us alone and nobody else," not amenable to external advice. I'm thinking particularly about those that have to do with the way we have learned to control our self-destructive impulses. This is just an obvious example of the truism that the solution to many of our most personal and important problems must lie solely *within ourselves*.

There are many personal mental processes like these in the category where external advice is worse than nothing, inappropriate, even dangerous. That is not just because we individually discovered them, but because they are unique links in our personally unique "damage control" apparatus. They are *part* of us. Few of us who have gone through the sequence of failure and self-correction can deny that in the process we learned priceless things about ourselves, about how "I," the individual "I," must shift to "*my*" uniquely peculiar mind-set to avoid panic or other self-defeating mental states. And forever after, it is often with a twinge of pride in our self-sufficiency, a smug thankfulness for our self-knowledge, that we employ our own private trick of gaining personal control and keeping it, even as we are being closed in upon by other outside forces and thwarting them simultaneously.

This is not the beginning of a book on the psychology of stress. It is an attempt, after sifting through nearly eight years of coping with an almost total loss of external control, to enter the subject of captivity on the plane that matters most when you're there: the mental plane. Captivity puts one in a position in which a despondent, panic-prone person can act to destroy his own life, or to destroy something many of us have learned is even more precious than mere life—one's own self-respect. Captivity is not a peculiar, hazy, easily forgettable, not-for-credit interlude in one's life; it is a full-fledged chapter, a total life, with emotional hazards, physical hazards, and moral hazards, the mishandling of which you will take to your grave, or worse: to eternal self-loathing. And the terrible truth is [that] our knee-jerk tendency in modern society to seek solutions through interaction with others—making a deal, polishing the apple, greasing the skids, buying into influences that are beyond our control, avoiding seeking solutions *within yourself*—can be the very triggering mechanisms that start the time bombs of those hazards ticking. What I am going to advocate throughout this book is a mental orientation that makes a full-time job of monitoring, tending each his own impulses, desires, aversions—in other words, only those matters over which he has control—while letting the world of "externals," the world of matters which are not up to him, fend for itself.

There is no "school solution" on exactly what to think about to calm down and deal with the claustrophobia induced by the Dilbert Dunker. Somehow, you just "get ahold of yourself and take charge of your mind."

A lesson in my taking charge of my own mind came from a Navy chief petty officer on the staff of a prison-survival school out in the California desert thirty years ago. He framed his lesson in the slogan "Get your head out of the box!"

Even in those long-ago 1950s, before Vietnam was even a rumor, the U.S. Navy ran a “check your rank at the door, no holds barred, no king’s x,” special physical-hazing-authorized training course for aviators, underwater demolition swimmers, and others considered to be in “capture risk” jobs. I was a fighter pilot, customarily flying jets off aircraft carriers in the Western Pacific, thirty-five years old, in the middle of the second week of this two-week prison-survival course, being put in “punishment” in a mock prisoner-of-war compound. The punishment on that hot day was to be stuffed, hand-cuffed, head forward and down, in a cramped, knee-bent position, into a tiny, wooden, sun-drenched hot box. The box lid, then pushed down against my back and locked, kept my body in compression. Although I could peek around and see a few light cracks down around my cramped knees, the interior was painted jet black, and as the sun heated the stuffy air, gloom, doom, and then panic overcame me.

It wasn’t long before I became obsessed with the idea that I had to get out! Now! Did these people know what they were doing? I would die of suffocation in this stupid peacetime drill! I started “humping” the lid with my back—trying to break my way out. I started screaming! “Come on, God damn it!” “The game is off!” “I cannot get air!” “I am taking charge as an officer.” “I order you to open up!”

My future friend’s, the chief petty officer’s, solution? He ordered a bunch of “prison guards” (specially trained American sailors in mock foreign uniforms) to start clubbing my box with baseball bats, raising dust inside and nearly splitting my eardrums with noise. I intensified my screaming, pushing up with what was, by box design, my poorly positioned back, trying to break the box’s lid.

Eventually, in their own time, the “prison guards” opened the lid and lifted me out, spittle running down my chin, chest heaving, gasping for breath. The disgusted chief dropped his disguise as a commissar, walked up to me, and shouted: “For Christ sake, Commander, get your *head* out of the box!” “Take charge of your own mind.” Then standing me aside, he partially closed the box’s lid and pointed to the light cracks at the bottom. “The air pressure down there and all through this box with the lid closed is 14.7 psi, the same as it is out here in the open, 14.7 psi. You’re not going to suffocate. Quit thinking about the inside of that damned black box and glue your mind to something that takes you a thousand miles away from it. Do you remember the route you took from your house to grade school? Now we’re going to put you back in that box, and I want you to walk to school! And walk *slowly* and try to remember the faces you used to meet on the sidewalk. Go out your front door, remember each house as you pass it, turn at the right corners, and get yourself to the front steps of your old school. My men will be beating the hell out [of] this hot box, but you’ve got to learn that *you* run your life and they don’t. So keep your mind, your head, out of this box!”

Well, of course it was easy that second time around. That chief had a good record as an inmate of a prisoner-of-war compound during the Korean War and years of experience analyzing and giving words of wisdom to guys like me who could have choked to death and killed themselves in the mock torture chambers on that California desert. He made absolutely no pretense of being a psychologist, but in one short

lesson he taught me more about the human mind, my mind, than I ever learned in psychology class.

After three more years of flying off the carriers, the Navy sent me to two years of graduate school in politics, economics, and history to complement my essentially technical background for broader future assignments. There at Stanford University I had plenty of time for electives, and though I did take a course in psychology, it was in philosophy that I found my home. There in those ancient texts I found the man whose viewpoints matched in essence what that wise chief had taught me: “Don’t waste yourself trying to change that world outside your sphere of influence; concentrate on matters that lie within your sphere of control, particularly control of yourself.” His name was Epictetus, a first-century Roman slave, crippled by a cruel master. Although a heathen, he became my patron saint.

Epictetus was a major contributor to the Stoic ethical tradition, and as I studied his texts I found that there was very little of the “I’ll hold out my arm and you break it” fare of hearsay tales, but a lot of good advice about how to take charge of your own life, asking no quarter and giving none, and not spending your days as a passive victim—being buffeted by the forces of good and evil—but in acting on the reality that the essence of both lies in the attitude of your *willpower*. Epictetus teaches nothing about Yuppie “virtues” like being good at “interacting,” or “sharing,” or being “caring.” But he is *very* good on the importance of self-sufficiency, the dignity of the individual, the brotherhood of man, and the fatherhood of God. As a fighter pilot, I was in a dangerous business, and his frequent allusions to the world I knew—armed combat and body-contact sports—drew me to him.

Difficulties are what show men’s character. Therefore when a difficult crisis meets you, remember that you are as the raw youth with whom God the trainer is wrestling.<sup>1</sup>

As if by Providence, these writings provided me the seeds of the best mental approach that I could conceive for how to behave when I found myself in a political prison in Hanoi, three years after I left that philosophy classroom.

And throughout that eight-year Hanoi episode, I had plenty of use for “keeping my head out of the box,” using whatever “private tricks” my mood would accept as a guide to keeping my mind focused on that which was up to me and shunning that which was up to others. Sometimes this was useful in physical predicaments of the sort cited in the illustrations above. But what the Stoics were addressing in the final analysis was the avoidance of mental perturbation. And no matter what your captivity problem, you may be sure that mental perturbation will in the last analysis be your Achilles’ heel, deserving of your best attention. It is my hope that in this short book you may discover the key to the mental discipline required to avoid entanglements with a captor’s desires, hates, opinions, and all things over which he, and not you, has control. It is only by this route that you may take possession of, and hold to, that freedom that ironically exists in all

captivity: the freedom to maintain your *own* attitude about what is going on. Through this comes peace of mind and some degree of imperviousness to the poisonous rays of fear and guilt that emanate from all prison walls.

## Chapter 2: Capture

Because of the way I was captured and brought into prison, I missed living through the normal capture phase—undergoing the shock of being instantly whisked, without any reflex defense, from normal man-on-the-street existence to captivity. But I think my experience as a political prisoner makes up for much of the lack. At least I have strong ideas about what should be borne in mind along the trail from being snatched off the street to being established in a hideaway.

No matter what you read before you are taken captive, when the axe falls you are probably going to secretly hold out for the idea that it's some sort of fluke, a mistake, that they got the wrong guy. As the minutes wear on and that possibility fades, it's then natural to grasp at the straws of hope that those holding you might not have their hearts in it, that with just the right nudge from you they might modify the project to your advantage, perhaps even set it aside.

These are comforting thoughts, maybe like nature giving you a shot of adrenalin to tide you over the panic period. So it would never do to discourage one's having them, and certainly I do not—*so long as you can contain yourself*. What I mean by containing yourself is having the mental discipline to keep your wits about you, guarding that inner personality which is yours, to be kept very *privately* yours now that you're captured, and not hearing yourself float some revealing willingness to compromise your integrity, to give aid and comfort to those who capture you in a frantic, knee-jerk search for an immediate solution to your monumental problem.

Strange that I should mention such a thing so quickly perhaps, but the true depth of the terror and feeling of anxiety that strikes one's heart upon realizing that he's truly been *had* deserves such a warning. And I can imagine it would seem so *natural* to a person coming from a hustling, goal-oriented world where the early bird gets the worm, to get a "feel out" offer out on the street fast. Surely, your flustered mind might think, there is *some* quid pro quo which would set me free. Why not shop around and find out what it is?

Well, all things may have a price in the World of Wall Street, but don't count on it in this World of Epictetus you just entered. Here, a totally different standard of value applies. By that I don't mean that it would be any grave error to try to *buy* your way out. Good luck—but if you choose to try, make your pitch solely in terms of money, never in terms of your loyalties, your mind, or your personal honor. Yes, I said personal honor; that old-fashioned concept has suddenly become the determining factor in what all is going to happen to you. There is no problem in investing your *money* in your flights of fancy. It's just that here, you can't afford to invest your *character*, your *reputation*, in them.

For this captive battle you're now entering is in its essence a battle of wills. The captor's goal is to *use* the captive; the captive's goal—at least by the time he comes to realize

that all uses of him are, at the very least, degrading—becomes one of *resisting*, staying off the hook.

Built into the captor's role is constant probing, testing, listening for signals of a chink in the moral armor of his captive, an entry point for his extortionistic crowbar, his tool of manipulating shame. He knows that from this time on, he can put on the squeeze through deprivation, carrot and stick, physical abuse, frame-ups, you name it, at any pace he selects, closing in, plying his trade, uncovering more vulnerabilities, working to get his victim on the hook. And thus any prisoner, particularly a brand-new one, who hints of being willing to make a deal on the plane of loyalty or personal honor immediately becomes very interesting to the ringleaders of any abduction gang.

What a fresh-caught sophisticated captive might see as a clever way to ease himself into a common-ground position conducive to good treatment and a short prison stay is in reality a bid for special propaganda work-ups and a very likely longer, rather than shorter, prison stay. And that is not to mention the emotionally destabilizing living hell of a prolonged imprisonment with fellow captives who distrust you. You have left the world of "every man for himself"; in prison societies the world over, the putting of loyalties out for hire is seen as reprehensible opportunism. Remember Epictetus:

If a person had delivered up your body to some passer-by, you would certainly be angry. And do you feel no shame in delivering up your own mind to any reviler, to be disconcerted and confounded?<sup>2</sup>

So much for a warning about capture-phase ethical hazards. What about physical hazards? What about making a break for it and going for an escape in the initial confusion of capture? There are recorded examples of mix-ups of timing in the captive-relocation maneuver, and stories of other unexpected events that have provided broken-field running room for kidnap victims. Some of them have made it; some have not.

There is lots of U.S. Government advice in print that discourages taking physical chances, including tempting ones during the capture phase. You can read documents like the Foreign Service Institute's *Terrorism: Avoidance and Survival* or the U.S. Third Army's *Terrorism: Security Survival Handbook*, which offer advice like this: "After being seized, don't fight back or attempt to aggravate the hostage taker. You may be blindfolded or drugged. . . . Pause, take a deep breath, and attempt to organize your thoughts. . . . Comply with the instructions of your abductors as well as you can. . . . Obey terrorist orders or commands. . . . Do not complain, act belligerently, or be uncooperative. . . . Do not deliberately turn your back to a terrorist; particularly not to the terrorist leader. . . . Be extremely courteous and polite to the terrorists. . . . If captured, play the game. . . ."

I don't agree with the tone of this sort of guidance. That is not to say that I would suggest you "fight back or attempt to aggravate the hostage taker." That is the antithesis of my advice, the advice of Epictetus. A "me versus him" mentality, like a "me in collusion with him" mentality (evidenced by such things as rushing to get a feel-out for your quick release out on the street), is the seedbed for mental perturbation first, and eventually, if carried to extremes, the collapse of the will, spirit, even the nervous system of the captive.

In fact, “me versus him” and “me in collusion with him” are to the Stoic but two aspects of the same mentality, two sides of the same coin. The idea is to have the self-discipline to rid yourself entirely of that coin, to concentrate, to the exclusion of all else, on your *own* aims, *own* opinions, *own* desires, *own* aversions, in short, that which is up to you, and *avoiding* getting emotionally involved in the mental process, desires, hates, or opinions of the captors. The key to the habitual prison posture advocated herein is not getting emotionally involved in such matters as are “externals,” matters over which you have no control, those not up to you.

What is the practical fallout of this on the physical risk scene? It is to have the confidence and composure to be your own judge on when to purposely take a chance on getting hurt. And on that I by no means suggest that your judgment be foolhardy. You can get killed in an escape. And take it from me, life *is* worth living in prison, you *can* live through it, in fact, with a strong will and the right mind-set you *can* prevail, and learn, and perhaps even make the experience the one lyric passage of your life. So forget anything that’s entered your head about suicidal escapes; your life is still precious, figure that in. But that still leaves plenty of room for fate to present to a brave and fit person what he comes to feel in his gut is a realistic chance to break free if he makes a run for it. The truth is that should such a combination pop up during his capture phase, the odds are that it is very likely to be the best such chance he’ll ever have in captivity.

There you have it, my hypothetical prisoner captured for only five minutes, and already tempted by the wiles of ethical opportunism and risky escape. On the matter of the first temptation, I say, “regardless of your gut feelings, you must not do it.” On the second, I say “your gut feelings are your best guide.” These temptations, in a nutshell, sum up my philosophy on how things should line up in captivity: The moral regime should be considered controlling, and rule-bound; the physical regime subsidiary and contingent. One should have the goal of absolute minimization of risks in the moral sphere, but absolute minimization of risks in the physical sphere is self-defeating. For in captivity, even death, the ultimate physical risk, is so random in its occurrence, so infrequently a function of the audacity of its victims, as to discourage making it the *sine qua non* of one’s operational style. Sailing under a banner of minimizing physical risks curtails too many of man’s finest impulses: to serve as an example to his fellows, to demonstrate his sense of personal honor, to express his indignation, to lead the way in self-sacrifice for others—all involve it.

In captivity, think of moral decisions as strategy, physical risk decisions as mere tactics. Ethical hazards are strategic trip wires. Fail to regard them seriously, and the extortionist system of the prison will get you on the hook and drive the quality of your life, your morale, your self-esteem down a slippery slide that you can stop only by taking overdoses of physical abuse. Facing up to the need to arrest an established downhill slide by challenging the torture train plowing down the track, willfully taking those overdoses of physical abuse, is a brave and critical use of tactics, something that many honorable prisoners, especially those who involve themselves in the special risks of clandestine leadership, find themselves in need of doing. But for the general case, the need to illuminate the obvious is clear: *the more diligently the moral high ground is held in the first place, the less likely the downhill slide is to start.* Breaking free of a “reliable lackey”

reputation is the most painful transition of prison life. For you are refusing to do what your captors have become used to your willingly doing, and they don't like that.

An extortionist prison works on the "ratchet" system. To refuse to comply with a demand that you do "A" means punishment. But to do "A" on demand and then refuse to do it on a subsequent demand is a completely different matter. In the first case you are guilty of being a "diehard," of having a generally uncooperative disposition. (It may not be obvious when you are first scolded for being in this category, but sooner or later you will realize that *that is exactly the status you want to maintain.*) In the second case, after complying with initial demand(s), and later refusing to continue, you will be charged, not with stubbornness, but with ingratitude, perfidiousness, betrayal, faithlessness—crimes of moral turpitude. That means *real* punishment. Suppose, sensing that, you set that decision aside and allow yourself to be coaxed into doing the even more compliant "B," then the still more compliant "C," and finally "D." Seeing you are on a disastrous downhill slide, you then recover your bearings and decide to work yourself all the way back to being an ordinary "diehard," a regular prisoner who is not spotlighted for every public-relations event, one having just a normal "generally uncooperative disposition." First, by making that decision, you will have just passed one of prison's greatest tests of character: to come back, against all odds. It will likely cost you months of pain and loneliness. But it will be worth every agony in the long run, because if you stay on the downhill slide, your captors will take you to the very bottom of the barrel. Making such a run back to "diehard" status, and breaking free, if only temporarily, gives one a sense of having learned what the world is all about; you will have earned your spurs as witness to the fact that without self-respect you have *nothing*.

Viktor Frankl has written that three years in such straits as I am describing equates to a university PhD in the humanities; this is why.

We who have spent significant periods of time as what I call "political prisoners," i.e., we whose confinement regimes were designed principally to break down our willpower (in that incessant battle of wills) so to *use* us, look back on such experiences as an almost *spiritual* rather than physical trial.

This distinction was brought out in a conversation I had with a fellow prisoner in Hanoi several years after we had been captured. His name is Vern Ligon. The year was 1971; I was 47 years old, and he was 49. We happened to be able to talk face to face because we had been locked in a punishment cell together after a riot of our underground organization had resulted in so many arrests there weren't enough cells to put all us culprits back in solitary. In fact, we were not only two to a one-man cell, we were two to a one-man "bed," side by side, each with one leg in the pair of stocks mounted at the foot of our three-foot-wide cement slab.

But we were happy. We had been picking up, via messages coming through our underground organization's clandestine communication network, telltale signs that spelled the imminent end of the torture and isolation era of our prison lives. We talked much of the immediate past five years, feeling relieved that life was soon to change.

This was not Vern Ligon's first imprisonment as a shot-down military aviator. He and one other of our Hanoi group that grew over the years to about 400 captured pilots had also been prisoners of the Nazis during World War II. Vern talked about his years in the Nazi prison. It was an old-fashioned prisoner-of-war camp, a relic of more

innocent times, the type you see on TV serials where a group of Americans live what you might call an “army life,” under their own (captured) commanders, sitting around visiting and playing tricks on the jailers. Vern said that life in a prisoner-of-war camp and life in the political prison in which we had been living were not comparable. “About the only things I had to worry about in Germany were cold and hunger, and although there were more of both there than here, in looking back it was a piece of cake. There was no *mental* agony, no threats of being made to look like a traitor; the Germans were interested only in having us locked up in safekeeping. Oh, there was some discipline. If you struck a guard, you got thirty days in solitary.<sup>3</sup> We got so bored in the big cell blocks with nothing to do but visit, and so tired of the same faces and same stories, that solitary was looked on as a rest camp. I remember one guy who had it down to a science. When about once every six months he felt like he was going to blow his stack, he would take station in front of the cell-block door in the early morning when he heard the guard unlocking it. And then as he yelled ‘today’s the day,’ he would knock the guard flat as he crossed the threshold. The Germans could be counted on to be methodical and do the same thing time after time; they would hustle our friend off to a solitary cell. And right on the mark, thirty days later, he would be brought back to us, unharmed, beaming, relaxed, and rested.”

[He continued:] “Those days were nothing like this Hanoi life: constant solitary, complete silence, having to hold our heads low while taking our bucket to the dump, being spied upon, hounded down, interrogated, harassed, beat upon. I’ll tell you, in the Nazi camp my only concern was wear and tear on my body. Here it’s wear and tear on my nervous system. No comparison.”

Most Americans think of “captivity” in terms of those TV movie sets. When you come home from a modern-day political prison, you have no recourse but to join in their inevitable question sessions that assume you were with *Hogan’s Heroes*. “How was the food?” “How much weight did you lose?” “Did you get any fresh air?” “Were you warm enough all the time?” “Did you have any feelings of friendship for your captors?” “How was the mail service?”

But when you get one old political prisoner alone with another, we exchange tales of quite a different nature: of nervous exhaustion, uncontrollable sobbing in solitude, the wages of fear, and the feelings of inadequacy, of guilt. It doesn’t do to discuss these matters with strangers; they put you down as some sort of wacko.

A couple of last points for the captive on the way to his first lockup, on the road to such a life as I’m starting to describe: (1) Start preparing yourself mentally to be all alone for at least a couple of months. Our popular image of prisoners being cooped up together is more often off the mark than on it, especially right after capture. (2) Start shedding any semblance of a “student body president” personality that’s left in you. You’ll soon be meeting your interrogator, and he eats student body presidents alive. By that I mean, he will size up your general needs to be praised and thought of as an attractive and agreeable person, hoping against hope that your needs along these lines are very strong. For it is the aggressively social person, our typical student body president, who can most readily be drawn into his captor’s causes, grievances, hates, desires, and all the rest. For this student body president, the epitome of the well-brought-up American, has been coached from birth to coax the flow of social intercourse, to have a sense of obligation to make conversation interesting, to respond openly—if not provocatively, to

keep the talk civil, and if put off by a levied demand that is distinctly not to his liking, to minimize abrasiveness by perhaps making countersuggestions.

In short, our American social model becomes in prison a “player,” an interesting person presiding over a seemingly bottomless supply of possibilities for his own exploitation. “Players” are easy marks for clever interrogators; they fairly beg to be put on the hook.

Captives are well advised never to make countersuggestions, even if their results would be harmless if accepted. To do so is to make an investment in your captor’s regime. Investments in *their* doings is in the long run a bad way to go. Forever thereafter what you suggested, and all that grew out of it as it was modified and gained new meanings over the years, will be thrown up to you as “your idea.”

The best long-term posture is to maintain the Stoic indifference to things within “their” power, particularly things having to do with how they run their extortion mill. The name of the game is to be as *uninteresting* as possible. Try portraying a measured defiance, while exuding a sinister unpredictability. This will keep you just short of the interrogator’s threshold of uncontrollable physical reprisal, too risky to take to a public press conference, and too menacing for comfortable conversation. That’s right where you want to be.

## Interlude: Before We Talk about Torture

In this twentieth century, many notorious prison camps have practiced physical torture of inmates, but some have not. The life of the mind in captivity is very much affected by which of the two sorts of camp the inmate occupies. Whereas with regard to other aspects of captivity, one can lump several general types of prison camps together and present a generalized account that is fairly informative, descriptions of torturing regimes and nontorturing regimes don’t mix. For background information, three categories of prison regimes are herein described and defined. All names and definitions are the author’s.

1. *Irrational Regimes*: These are confinement systems which show little evidence of any plan for the purposeful exploitation of captives. Fickleness and vengeance seem to be their only earmarks. Best modern example: Japanese prisons for Americans during World War II. They seem to have been run by the whims of local authorities, even whims of prison guards. Unsupervised prisoner-bashing by belligerent guards for recreation or pure meanness was seemingly ignored, as was self-serving fraternization by obsequious guards begging English language coaching, sometimes from the same prisoners in the very same cell block! In short, accounts come down to a potpourri of disconnected, seemingly unfocused events, highlighted by purposeless brutality. Few modern tyrants or cult kingpins would tolerate such wasteful self-indulgence. Irrational regimes are now exceedingly rare. Given the availability of modern worldwide communication facilities and the rising literacy and political consciousness of the world’s people, prisoners are now generally being seen as too valuable as political pawns or objects of propaganda to be squandered as recreational punching bags for the hired help.

2. *Rational Regimes with Torture*: A rational regime is one designed to extract theatrical propaganda-oriented services from the captives. I define torture using the very specific meaning it acquired among us American captives in North Vietnamese prisons: the intentional application of pain in an effort to force a prisoner's compliance with specified demands, e.g., writing a statement or recording a confession. To be tortured was to undergo a process that had a well-defined beginning and a well-defined ending, a one- or two-hour episode throughout which specially trained "torture guards" worked to obtain the cry of "I submit" from the prisoner. Neither the wearing of handcuffs nor restraint in leg irons, or being slapped around by a prison guard in an unprogrammed manner, qualified as torture, for those were all part of the daily routine in that prison system and fell, by our system of explicit definitions, into the category of "inconvenience." (For clarity in our clandestine communication, we had to know which was which for tactical reasons: "torture," we knew from experience, was always the product of a specific decision of the Vietnamese prison command chain, a policy matter okayed by the commissar. "Torture" was programmed; "inconvenience" was casual. Why prisoner leaders found it important to keep track of which was which has already been explained.)
3. *Rational Regimes without Torture*: There are many examples of these, including some segments of the Communist Chinese detention system during the Korean War.<sup>4</sup> Common in these confinement regimes is the manipulation of prisoners in such group-think processes as "Criticism/Self-Criticism" wherein what start out as soft-sell discussion groups become transformed in response to the powers of suggestion and the imperatives of group dynamics into guilt-producing pressure cookers. All exploitation systems generate pressures of self-revulsion to gain control of targeted victims. These noncoercive ones just concentrate on generating internal conflicts, self-generated pressures.

"Inconvenience" measures, solitary confinement, and isolation are not uncommon in (1), (2), or (3). Most of what I write about is what I have experienced, and from this point on the focus of this book is on confinement regime (2): rational regimes with torture.

## Chapter 3: The Torture Machine

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again . . . ; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; . . . and . . . if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

Theodore Roosevelt

It is said that all things are possible in torture. A person can be killed, maimed, or driven insane. That is why so many people have a morbid curiosity about the subject. That is the idea behind the terror the mere prospect of torture engenders in the man on the street. And of course, that is what propels that father of terrors—human imagination—into working such devilry within our minds, blinding us with fear even before torture's first blow approaches.

Nobody escapes this fear, not even the Stoic; his fears, like all his emotions, *are* up to him. Thus, human fear is an integral, indeed a functional, part of the torture phenomenon. The efficacy of the whole mechanism is wrapped up in it. And that makes cool-headed *analysis* of it, the taking apart and examining of it, as would Teddy Roosevelt's "critic"—the abstract thinking your way through its elements and their powers and limits—and *experiencing* it, *taking* it as "the man who is actually in the arena" takes it, two entirely different matters. When it comes to torture, analysis is sterile without anecdotal accounts of how it is to take it. And anecdotal accounts alone force thoughtful readers to see it only through the frenzied eyes of a person engulfed in irrational as well as rational fears.

Arthur Koestler is one of the few authors whose writings manage to cover both sides of this matter. Take, for instance, the way he handles fear and reality in the chapter he calls "The First Hearing" in his classic *Darkness at Noon*. He does it through the thoughts of the old Bolshevik leader and experienced prisoner Rubashov as the latter takes stock of his familiar predicament from his cell soon after he was hauled up in a Stalinist purge of the late 1930s:

Rubashov heard the sound of several people marching down the corridor in step. His first thought was: now the beating-up will start. He stopped in the middle of the cell, listening, his chin pushed forward. The marching steps came to a halt before one of the neighbouring cells, a low command was heard, the keys jangled. Then there was silence.

Rubashov stood stiffly between the bed and the bucket, *held his breath, and waited for the first scream. He remembered that the first scream, in which terror still predominated over physical pain, was usually the worst; what followed was already more bearable, one got used to it and after a time one could even draw conclusions on the method of torture from the tone and rhythm of the screams.\** Towards the end, most people behaved in the same way, however different they were in temperament and voice: the screams became weaker, changed over into whining and choking.

*Darkness at Noon*, p. 13

After years of reflection, *this* old man who is your author, one who "knows the great enthusiasms," strived, and like all who battle the torture machine, fell time and again, has come to believe that in the interest of learning, both the analytical and anecdotal approaches are worth a look. In this chapter I will do my best to speak both as "the critic" and "the man who is actually in the arena."

\*Italics added.—Eds.

The first bit of analysis has to do with the business of this overworked idea about “all things being possible in torture.” When you add the idea of rationality, torturing mainly to feed a theatrical propaganda machine, death and insanity pop up as total waste, and maiming becomes a problem requiring risky cover-up. Doesn’t that mean that the odds of a person being totally wrecked in the torture mill are way down around the running percentages of accidental strangulations or other overshoots of overzealous goons practicing their art “in the arena”? It means just that.

I’m not saying that thoughts of this nature can be expected to occur right off to a person about to be taken into the torture mill for the first time. I mean that as time wears on, after several trips into the teeth of it, he just might have come across some facts that set him thinking, facts something like those that jumped out at me. I mean, perhaps the interrogating officer’s constant use of the future tense, his ceaseless assurance that in time you will be convinced that the only intelligent thing to do is to go along with his demands to get in the jeep and go and behave “civilly and calmly” at a press conference, and so on. And then comes the realization of the neophyte that the torture goons are under orders to not permanently mark him (cloth jammed under the ropes binding his arms before tourniquet pressure is applied, heel-of-the-hand head jolts to the jaw, just sufficient to make him see stars, rather than skin-cutting fist jabs to nose). When such evidence surfaces repeatedly, it can’t fail to occur to our prisoner that *he* has some trump cards too, that his true value seems to be based on his present state: alive, sane, and unmarked.

Such a realization can strike a spark of hope in a desperate man and start him on the captive’s most profitable quest: figuring out how the overall extortion system that he is pitted against *really* works. What is its purpose? What are its limits? What and who powers it?

It is natural that in hindsight, such a realization—of there being limits, or at least tradeoffs, working to restrain the captors’ use of what had at first seemed to be infinite power to pulverize him—would cause our hypothetical prisoner to think back and reflect on his impressionable and fear-drenched reactions to his very first experiences in captivity. Surely there were at least a few hours when he intentionally gave ground grudgingly but cautiously, taking stock of the situation, not yet having quite mustered the courage to reply with the flat “no.” If he’s honest with himself, he’ll thank his lucky stars that he ultimately didn’t take a real dive merely on *threats* of death or worse. But unless he’s a very rare American, he would also have to admit that he now has thoughts of regret that he didn’t take a stand sooner.

For the one internal decision that is agonizing beyond all others in captivity is finally coming up with that flat, two-letter word, “no,” when it means willingly forcing, daring, the captor to carry out his threat of physical abuse. This great turning point almost always takes place in a frenzied moment with the new prisoner awash in a sea of guilt and fear. The guilt comes from having “gone along” with the captor’s demands for a little of this and a little of that, while, in the fashion of most well-brought-up Americans, he had chosen “the middle way” (to his now-devastating regret) as he took preliminary measure of his predicament.

And the fear! It will likely surpass any he will ever experience again. Arthur Koestler, now in the first person, described *his* initial fear of torture (in a Fascist prison in Spain)

as “not a healthy fear, but of the obsessional and morbid variety . . . the neurotic type of anxiety . . . the irrational anticipation of the unknown punishment.”

Until you say “no,” it is fair to assume that a rational regime will keep upping the ante of humiliating requirements till they find the upper limit of your degradation tolerance. That is part of their calibration process of “knowing their enemy,” even as the smart captive is already taking mental notes in pursuit of his same goal of getting to “know *his* enemy.” Rational torture regimes are primarily tied to the public-relations business and have to be able to predict the “acting up” or “going bananas” threshold of any captive they intend to put on display. A rebellious scene before the cameras of neutrals or unrelies at a press conference can cost the prison commissar his job.

But of course, I’m now way out ahead of the “hypothetical prisoner” scenario that started this discussion, and well into personal hindsight. But in the main, this chapter is based on hindsight, almost completely composed of data that pops into focus only after you’ve put all the pieces together, and know the “arena” well enough to properly interpret what all is taking place in it.

As the incisive prisoner seeks answers to questions like Just how does the system work?, What is its purpose?, What and who powers it?, he is sometimes surprised to find out that it’s not at all like the movies, where the uncooperative prisoner is pounced upon by thugs, lined up against the wall, and brutalized with blows to the solar plexus, eye gougings, and so on. What the extortionist’s logic demands is the breaking of the “obdurate” prisoner’s will, breaking his resistance in a manner that will trigger his “volunteering” the statement being demanded. All convincing propaganda material must seem to come “from the heart.” Barroom brawl tactics would serve only to enrage and peak up the resistance of the victim, probably making him hang on till he was knocked unconscious, rendered incapacitated, and thus useless.

As a matter of fact, pain saps the resistance more effectively if the *victim* is made to feel that *he is actually inflicting it on himself*. And that is exactly how the torture process works. It is *the prisoner, not the goon*, who in effect says when it starts and when it stops. The impression is meant to sink into the prisoner’s consciousness that it is he himself who starts, stops, and controls the throttles of the torture machine. And that, in the general case, is not a false impression. The whole rational torture regime is cast in the dialectic of a reform school. “Every right-thinking person has a social obligation to support our cause; we make reasonable requests; when you show bad faith and refuse, you of course must be punished; you know the rules and it’s all up to you; the system runs in automatic.” Force makes no appearance as long as “student” does everything asked of him; it is only when he says “no” that “punishment becomes necessary.” And when he says “I submit,” it stops.

But that is not to say one would want some kind of certified psychologist master-minding this operation. All you need is a commanding and mean s.o.b. who has an instinct for what makes people squirm. And the squirming usually starts at an interrogation table, which is ordinarily part of the furniture in the enclosed area I’m calling the arena. Over the previous days or weeks, before the captive is led into the arena, the interrogation/calibration process will probably have worked itself up to the stage where the interrogating officer has a good hunch that he is nearing the point of the captive saying “no.” When the captive (seated before him, on a lower stool to add that always-present

extra measure of psychological stress) does refuse, saying “no” to that demand for action or that demand for information, the officer will probably throw a dramatic tantrum and yell for the guards. Now the captive’s squirming will get serious, as something on the order of what follows commences taking place.

Three or four ordinary guards plus one or two torture goons carrying a long (six feet or so), heavy (eighty-pound) iron bar, thick iron ankle lugs, and a coil of manila hemp rope will barge in from their standby position just outside the door. The interrogating officer will rant while the guards and goons pick up with huzzahs and other general hate shouts, filling the room with an impending “hanging” atmosphere designed to peak the fear level of the captive.

The interrogating officer might clear the room and ask for a reconsideration of the “no”; endless possibilities exist for manipulating fear and trying to get the captive to wise up and “think of his loved ones” before the real torture operation is triggered. When this “reconsideration” drama has run its course, and the interrogating officer decides it is time to strike, he shouts the order, the goons rush in again, probably knock the captive off his stool with a head-jolting heel of the hand to the jaw, huzzahs build, and then in rapid succession ankle lugs go on and fasten the victim to the heavy bar in the sitting position, one goon slaps his face alternately right and left while his partner moves behind him and locks his wrists together with tight “squeeze” manacles, and then immediately commences intricate rope reevings under, through, and between the prisoner’s upper arms.

The stage is now set for the crucial action to begin, and every effort will have been made in prior threats, and now with atmospherics, to imprint in the mind of the victim that there are *no* restraints on the goons, *no limits* to the action to be taken against him until he “submits,” in effect withdrawing his “no.”

(In this hindsight view, I wish to make it perfectly clear that in Hanoi, torture deaths *have* been recorded in such settings. On reconstruction after the Vietnam War, after the data was all in, the occurrence of death turned out to be relatively rare, in some proportion of less than 2% of all tortures—yet finite. There were almost no prisoner witnesses to torture, and although we are convinced that some cases of death sprang from vengeance, the exact causes in most cases are open to conjecture. But given the theatrics and emotional pitch generated as part of the psychological mood to spur submission, the stage was set for inadvertent overshoots. Even in a “black box” drill at the Navy’s California desert survival school, described above, there was a years-ago case of a death brought about by a man suffocating in his own vomit.)

Huzzahs continue as the goon behind the prisoner (the usual position of the boss torture mechanic) pushes the victim’s head forward, then stands up on his back and jumps him down to a jackknife position, with his face pushed flat against his lower legs. This chief torturer then commences strenuous upward jerks on the rope ends, each taking a tighter nonslip “bite” of the victim’s upper arms as these limbs are pulled closer and closer together, blood circulation having long since stopped in them.

The mind of the man on the bottom is now awash in overlapping pains, agonies, and apprehensions. With each jerk of the ropes his shoulders are pulled closer together, his back is bowed to where he thinks his chest bones are about to pop out. The rope grooves in his upper arms are smarting, the blood stoppage has made his lower arms dead numb

except for piercing pains that feel like cattle-probe shocks when his elbows are banged, and claustrophobia is closing in on him while his head is pushed forward by the heel of the extended foot of the goon standing on his back. Within minutes the prisoner's feelings become concentrated in stark urgency, of trying to get his breath through a compressed windpipe, of somehow knowing that the blood-starved nerves in his lower arms are causing permanent damage, its severity increasing with each ticking minute, of knowing all this will go on and on and get worse and worse unless he blows the whistle. Finally comes the shut-off point in his mental processes beyond which there *is* no thought of past, future, cause, or purpose; it just happens that at some level of consciousness he hears the "noes" he has been screaming in reply to the officer's shouts of "Do you submit?" suddenly change to "yeses."

And it's all over. Heavenly peace—but not quite. There is the poignant pause, then the torture goon's personal "signature" of something like a couple of "exclamation mark" rope jerks, and *then* he starts loosening the bindings and literally getting off the captive's back. The latter then gets a shocking sensation of something like hot oil rushing into his arms as they start to throb in pain, rhythmically. The blood is coming back. Then real heavenly peace. He would rather have died in the ropes, but there was no way to get at himself.

Sounds grim. It is. Once you're put back alone in your cell, the psychological backlash can be devastating. You have just come face to face with the fact [that] you too are human, you too have limits. After the first time, through this process, you can't get rid of the idea that surely you have been carrying these serious character flaws around with you all the years without knowing it. Didn't John Wayne stare down the commissar, grit his teeth, and hold out for God and Country?

But you're not as bad as you think; you just don't know the statistics yet. Hundreds of times just such episodes took place over a five-year period in Hanoi. The "men actually in the arena" were not irresponsible kids. All were college graduates, most of them adventuresome fighter pilots, at least half of them football players, and all had to have been experienced in body-contact sports. And not one John Wayne. In that sense, there were no winners.

But look at it this way. Neither, among that broad sample of men I was incarcerated with, did I know a single case of a person being turned into a willing zombie, broken in spirit, ready to do the captor's bidding without question, even after repeated trips into this arena. The torture machine did *not* turn out to be a "behavior modifier" which established a lasting fix; it was good for only one-time stands: one rope trick, one confession.

The fact that no John Waynes arose to vanquish the machine did not mean it did not produce heroes. Those heroes were ordinary guys, most of them out of college only a few years, and in no sense zealous ideologues. They were, by and large, just well-brought-up middle Americans, too dignified, too put off, and too sensible to hold still for any "ratchet system" pleas like "But you agreed to do this yesterday; you must do it today." It was they who would not buy any of the "behavior modification" bunk. They would just say "no," day after day, watch the goons rush in with their torture tools time after time, and let them do their damndest.

The fact is, a high price is paid by a captor's organization when a torture program is made an integral part of his extortion system. Every person who goes through it is thoroughly alienated, thoroughly turned off, and permanently made angry. And the more the torture program's "customers" think about the mentality behind such a policy, the more angry it makes them.

And after a man's been through this torture mill three or four times he gains tolerance for it and becomes more clever in making them work for a "submit" (*always* make them work for it), and submitting in visible anguish (*always* in visible anguish), and now that he realizes that the "settling up" part of the game occurs at the nearby table after the tumult and the shouting die, he consciously (*always* consciously) submits at a point short of loss of mental skills. He knows to be inwardly cool and calculating when he staggers anonymously from the floor over to that interrogation table to pay the "price" for his submission. He can't hold the pen because his fingers are numb; he fumbles; he appears dazed; he loads the confession with double entendre of the sort he has learned will probably go undiscovered; he is taciturn, but seems more confused than he really is. He is learning how to get even.

In short, he has learned to be less than satisfactory as a "repentant student" but not a mad dog asking to be stomped into a mental oblivion. He has become a Stoic, and, like the Stoic Epictetus, he "plays well the given part."

Remember you are an actor in a drama of such sort as the Author chooses—if short, then in a short one; if long, then in a long one. If it be his pleasure that you should enact a poor man, or a cripple, or a ruler, or a private citizen, see that you act it well. For this is your business—to act well the given part, but to choose it belongs to another.<sup>5</sup>

Like a Stoic, our young prisoner is not ashamed of his ego, but he has grown to the point where he does not need to wear it on his sleeve.

Quality propaganda that rings of heartfelt commitment is almost never obtained from a reluctant candidate with whom the torture battle has been joined. All that is usually obtained is flat, sing-song, obviously insincere material. Only with prolonged isolation that seriously destabilizes the nervous system can any hope be held out to salvage such a bungled case. Blackmail is probably a better bet than either torture or isolation. But for that you need a man with a conscience and a deep shame.

That commanding and mean s.o.b. who runs the extortion system has to know how to make people squirm in this physical game, but his big payoffs come from knowing how to make them squirm in the shame game, the moral game. As Napoleon said, in combat the moral is to the physical as 3 is to 1.

The bottom line of this mixture of analysis and anecdotal accounts of the torture machine is that a vigorous person can learn to live with it. Moreover, when you live with it, you live with self-respect. Nobody in our Hanoi underground organization was ever turned into a boot-licking, broken-spirited accomplice by this device. Yet we did have boot-licking, broken-spirited accomplices in our midst. Those were the few guys who never said "no." They didn't want to face up to the general prudential rule for living

within torture regimes: the indignity performed to avoid torture is more devastating to the soul than the indignity tortured out of you.

## Chapter 4: Alone

Let others practise law-suits, logical puzzles and syllogisms: let your study be how to suffer death, bondage, the rack, exile: let all this be done with confidence and trust in Him who has called you to face them, and judged you worthy of this place you hold.<sup>6</sup>

You will pretty well know when your shakedown sessions in the torture arena are coming to an end. The manner of the interrogator and goons will speak for the fact that they think they have squeezed out about all the juice they're going to get out of you for the time being. You will be frazzled, hurting, and very tired. Your sleep throughout the days and nights since you arrived in prison will likely have been only catnaps between torture sessions, on the floor under the interrogation table. The big tipoff that you're about to be moved would be getting stern and detailed orders to "keep silent at all times in the cell-block areas." "Any communication whatsoever with other criminals" and you will be right back in the grip of the torture machine.

After you signed your final statement, your prison kit would be brought in and thrown down beside you: two sets each of prison coveralls and underwear, some sort of "go-ahead" footwear, probably a drinking cup and plate resembling dog dishes, a blanket, and maybe a towel. It would be indicated that all this travels with you rolled up in the blanket whenever you are moved. You would put on your assigned coveralls as all personal items are taken from you—every stitch of clothes and everything you were carrying when you were captured: all papers, money, pictures, pendants, eye glasses, watches, rings, etc.—and away you would go with the armed escort guard, possibly wearing a blindfold, through a maze of dark tunnels in which there was no sign of life. When you are stopped by a touch on the arm by the silent guard, a cell-door bolt is thrown back, you are pushed in, blindfold removed, the door slammed and bolted behind you, and the last sound you hear is the big padlock clicking shut and then banging against the door once or twice after the guard releases it and silently steals away.

As relieved as you are to be away from the torture machine for a while, deep gloom will probably overcome you within a few hours. The cell would be dirty, small, and dingy. The air would be permanently smelly and stale. There would be no windows, no light on, just enough inside daylight leaking around the boarded-up transom to see where you are going. Reading would be barely possible even if printed material were present. But as a general rule you would have no access to reading material, and no eye glasses provided even if you needed them. You would have no way to judge the time of day, except by prison routine, with which you are not yet familiar. You feel like you have just been stashed in an anteroom to hell. You are in body and in spirit totally alone.

Although the life of the mind during sieges of torture occasionally focuses itself on the future—"My God, what's next?"—and sometimes between bouts reflects on the

immediate past—"Oh Lord, what will they do with that tape recording I just made?"—by far the mind's most common field of vision is the *present*. While in the torture arena, you have your hands full in the "here and now," parrying immediately threatening thrusts.

But when locked up more or less permanently alone, and surely once you acknowledge to yourself that this is really happening to you for keeps, you come to live in the past. Reflections and memories seem to be always in your mind. And more than you would have guessed, and certainly more than you would like, in that solitary gloom they tend to haunt you.

In the sense that in the world of the mind, torture is the playground of fear, in solitary confinement, your mind becomes the playground of guilt, that creeping feeling of inadequateness and failure with respect to your obligations.

And whereas in the previous chapter I expressed my belief that in the public mind torture is overrated as a behavior modifier, in this chapter I will endeavor to explain why I think that isolation is by and large *underrated* as one. But to have that be true, the reader must understand, I am talking about solitary confinement and isolation in terms of years, not months.<sup>7</sup> I am talking about my personal experience (over four years alone); I am talking about the solitary experience of only a few (one out of twelve) of my fellow long-term prisoners in Hanoi. For it was only that small proportion who had over two years alone. Having lived through it, I can say that (except for what might be called unusual cases) it takes time spans of two years or more totally alone before most people come to truly feel that real possibility out there that you could in fact come to lose the grip on yourself.

Of course, where behavior modification is the goal of a captor, there are things that can be done with the confinement regime of loneliness that will facilitate driving the victim into depression to speed up the disintegration process, just as we saw that in torture there are things you can do with the way in which pain is applied that will facilitate a victim's speedy submission. (To let him, in effect, torture himself, for instance.)

It's an irony of an extortionist prison that no matter where you are in the *process*, in torture or solitary, *random*, seemingly *irresponsible* action, completely *out of the control* of the tormenting forces, has a more destabilizing and resolve-breaking effect on the victim than images of regimented military discipline and "irresistible force." You learn a lot about human nature in prison, your nature included, and I came to realize how much more comforting to the human psyche is *dependable* routine, even the most highhanded, militaristic, even *sadistic* routine, than slapdash randomness. Fyodor Dostoevsky, an eight-year prisoner of the Russian czarist regime in Siberia in the middle nineteenth century, concluded that "Man is a creature that can get accustomed to anything, and I think that is the best definition of him."<sup>8</sup> But once a man gets *accustomed* to things working in a certain way, seemingly senseless aberrations of established routine can drive him up the wall.

Of course, it goes without saying that if one is clever enough to try to unhinge prisoners by playing on this trait of human nature, the careless action and lack of control cannot in any way be perceived as being "put on"; the jail staff needs to have a well-established *never-do-well* reputation with the inmates to be credible. But that ordinarily comes easy in jails of the sort extortionists and terrorists run.

For instance, I'll never forget the terror that was struck into my heart by the awkward fumbling of a hick novice guard's unsupervised and unconscious fooling around in a way that endangered a third-time breaking of one of my recently rebroken knees. At the time, I was in solitary, stashed with my legs locked in the lugs of the six-foot, eighty-pound torture bar. This strong-boy, "village idiot"-type kid opened my cell door and wandered in, lifted up the leg bar, haphazardly tried to balance it on a little stool, and then roamed about the cell while it teetered this way and that waiting to fall. He was not particularly menacing, just seemed to be amusing himself by "teasing the animals." I had no reason to believe that this guard knew anything about the history of my leg breaks, let alone that if the bar fell off the stool in the wrong direction the stresses would tear the cartilage apart again. To make matters worse, he was known to have absolutely no knowledge of the English language.

His totally ad hoc, random activities *really* shot my anxiety level up—clear off the scale of where it normally peaked in the ropes—all the more so (this eliminating in my mind the comforting possibility of his just acting as a part of a trick) because I was positive that, for the sake of their convenience, the prison authorities did not want that knee broken again. This all went together to mean one thing: that there I was, at the mercy of a random, mindless, irresponsible force. It was like being a prisoner of the Japanese in World War II! Talk about destabilization! I was never so vulnerable to an acquiescence to an on-the-spot propaganda demand. Had there been an interrogator there with a sixth sense of extortion and a note pad, I could have been had. Anything to get the oaf to put the bar down and leave!

Examples of destabilizing vagaries in the solitary confinement case would include such things as having food delivered to cells by totally irresponsible guards who seemed to forget which cells had prisoners in them and bypass certain occupied ones time and again. Of course, political prisons of the sort we commonly encountered in Hanoi have no grievance system, no way for the hungry to communicate with the food carriers. To call out, in *any* language, to make any noise, is a punishable offense. In this situation, unreliable delivery of *normal* food rations was more destabilizing and devastating to the prisoner who was alone and bypassed than a *starvation diet*, imposed as a spiteful punishment, acrimoniously but reliably delivered, on the dot, at each meal time.

Ill-disciplined jailers who ignore full toilet buckets, forget to let the prisoner sweep his cell out, absentmindedly half fill water jugs, and can't be relied upon in any way, build more internal pressure within the captive than martinets who set up and hold petty cleanliness inspections regularly.

And building pressure, building pressure, is the essence of exploitation systems. Whereas in torture, the pressure comes from anxieties and pain imposed from outside the victim, the key in isolation pressure-building is triggering the buildup of the captive's internal, self-generated pressures. Frustration is a key mechanism for generating that internal pressure.

Political prisons always have "trip-wire" regulation systems—made to be violated. They load their books up with regulations that run counter to human nature (like the "no communication rule"), as well as a too-thick sheaf of small-minded, chicken-manure regulations so plentiful and detailed that even the most cautious prisoner is usually in violation of several at any one time. The idea is to keep everybody on the hook and off

balance; at any instant, an off-the-shelf moral justification is available to call in “the usual suspects” for punishment from any quarter, anytime. But the most powerful destabilizing aspect of this tactical “trip-wire” system comes from never having authority pronounce a definitive sentence, never closing a discipline case. Completing a clearly defined imposed punishment for a specified wrong creates in a prisoner a feeling of satisfaction and finality that he is never entitled to have. (None of this WWII German “thirty days in solitary for striking a guard.”) Furthermore, much use is made of the ruse of casting offenses in the mold of moral turpitude, “ingratitude for humane treatment,” rather than “communicating contrary to regulations.” The punishment can go on and on, be stopped, and then be started all over again, indefinitely. All they need to say is, “Your apology for ingratitude lacks sincerity.”

The prisoner can never pay his debt; the books are never balanced. Gloom and guilt are meant to permeate the cell-block atmosphere as the internal pressures build, and build, and build.

In your loneliness, you pace the floor up and down the length of your cell: four steps up, spin around, four steps back. There is a cement slab bed (ankle stocks affixed to its foot) on which you are expected to lie at night. You know it’s night when a single bare bulb hanging too high to be reached is illuminated. Dingy semidarkness all day, incandescent brightness in your eyes all night—that is the lighting scheme. The only thing that ever seems to move is the cover of the “judas hole” (peep hole) in the door. It pops open every so often to be silently filled with a single sinister eye of the patrolling guard, putting the “whammy” on you.

During the day there are a couple of feeding times when the cell door opens to reveal a bowl of gruel or some such on the floor outside; you are to pick it up, bow to the waist, and back into the cell with it while the nonspeaking scullery cook who brought it glares at you mutely. Aside from that, a daily walk with a supervising guard to the privy to dump your toilet bucket, and infrequent trips to the prison-yard horse tank to wash your hands, face, and maybe your shorts if you have time, is all that ever happens. Unless you are also in punishment on a part-time basis.

Other humans are never seen nor heard; from the time your cell door is opened till it’s bolted behind you, all prison yards and walkways within your vision span are cleared. You listen for other cell door openings and closings, look for signs of other prisoners being kept nearby. Nothing.

For months, you seem to be totally absorbed in worry and guilt about the material you were forced to give in the initial torture shakedown. You are constantly preoccupied with thoughts of those you left behind—if and how they might have an idea of where you are, what your predicament is. And you worry about the many regulation trip wires that can put you in the ropes on most any whim of the jailers. (As always in a political prison, it is *you* who initiate pain and trouble.) In short, your morale is at rock bottom as you stare ahead into the endless possibilities for grief that extend to your mental horizons and beyond, half-way sure you’ll meet your fate in insanity from loneliness.

But nature has a surprise for you. You’re not going to go crazy in there as you pace four steps up and four steps back, month after month. “No such luck,” you might think, when

one day it dawns on you that you're stuck with yourself and that you might as well get acquainted with that person you really are. You might have already noticed that you have been subconsciously shaping your days into a repetitive routine. And did you stop and realize that time was not moving so slowly as it did at first? Now there was getting to be a self-imposed routine, a time for this and a time for that, hardly enough left to squeeze any in for your own pure pleasure! *That* was the unexpected thing: having your life under control seemed to bring you more comfort than "just letting it all hang out," languishing in some flaccid form of indulgent self-pity.

You don't just sit on the side of that cement slab bed when the light goes off in the morning and start conjuring up happy memories of a life gone by. That's recreation; that comes later. Right now you have to do some sitting-up exercises; you have to have a couple of exercise periods every day if you're going to get tired enough to drop off to sleep right after that bare-bulb light comes on. And a particular time in the day gets established for prayer or meditation, and a right time for casual "walks down memory lane," when you just let old ideas float, and a right time to remember, specifically remember, sequences of your life in seasons past.

This is not to say that you've consciously cooked up a schedule for yourself. There are larger forces at work than some "self-sustaining coping routine" you might have found yourself purposely designing. You are *not* making blueprints for those houses in your mind that all the newsstand books say prisoners come to mentally build. You are being enveloped by—"returning to," you might say—the primeval instincts of the human race. Man builds order to replace chaos; routine and ritual satisfy some deep need. "Is the need for ritual in your life connected with mankind's drive for organized religion?" (You get so you dare to pose such blasphemous questions as that to yourself.)

What is happening over the months is that your mind, robbed of its customary daily (junk?) inputs of sensory and empirical data, is drying out and starting to bloom as a creative thinking device. You first notice the surge of memory acuity. "Why do those images keep popping into my mind? That was years and years ago, and I had forgotten all about that phase of my life."

The feeling comes over you that "forgotten" phases may be loaded; they particularly need exploring. "Why is it that I feel uncomfortable about that association? Ah, now I know. I had successfully forgotten that. Why bring that embarrassment up in this awful place, where I'm barely hanging on to my equilibrium by my fingernails?" But something tells you that you don't deserve to ignore those embarrassments. You seem to know that in this life where you now find yourself it isn't right to dust off irritations with the flimsy excuses that used to be so easy to find in all that happy clatter of the big world of freedom, that big, wide world of yackety yack. "You have but one self and here is where you must get to know him, *all* of him. Here, alone, in this dungeon, is where your back is to the wall and where you must properly marshal all your resources. You must take inventory of what you have on your shelves, good stuff and bad. Come clean; dig out those hidden cancers, have a look at them, scrape them clean."

And that takes months, and you never quite get finished. But surprise, surprise—though at first it doesn't always make you feel good to see your past stripped bare, you experience a comfort in having done so. You know it has to be done if you're to be honest in conversations with yourself month in and month out, *ad infinitum*. (Yes,

you unabashedly speak aloud to yourself now; there are really *two* “selves” in this cell, you know.) Suddenly here, where you can’t escape from yourself, facing every reality becomes a cleansing thing.

Thus go weeks of almost uninterrupted reflective thought. But then when you least want to break away, things happen to flip-flop moods in your life. Always the interruption, the irritation. These people are so unreliable! Three days without a bucket dump; you heard him twice yesterday and he just walked by. It started overflowing and there was piss all over the floor. What kind of a person would treat even an animal like this? You got so mad you started to cry.

But you got over it when you stopped and got your head out of the box and back into your heavy work schedule. “For Christ sake, Commander, get your *head* out of the box!” “Take charge of your own mind.” How many years ago did that chief petty officer teach you that? At least ten. Smart guys, old jailbirds.

But sometimes we have to learn the hard way. Like a couple of months ago, the first time the guy let your bucket overflow. You were your old self there for a few minutes: a loudmouthed naval officer who “needed to get some action going.” The third time you heard him walk by you let fly: “Open the door, you lazy son of a bitch; we’ve got to get this bucket dumped!”

Well, you got some action going, all right. The guard came, slapped you around, took you to the interrogator. The travelling irons were clamped to your ankles. “I provided you humane treatment on the condition that you remain silent. You flaunted my kindness and made loud talk. You are ungrateful; go to the wall.” And there you stood, day and night, for a steady four days, arms high up on the wall, guards stationed in shifts behind you to kick the short irons (into which your ankles had swollen) whenever you let arms slump or acted up. Then the one-shot routine: ropes, submission, apology, a statement signed, and of course a friendly lecture.

“You have been alone for over a year now. You don’t have to live like this. All we ask is to be shown consideration. Our cause is just. Things can be arranged. Ask the guard for a paper and pen if you ever want to write me a note of request for reconsideration.”

And then back into this cell. So sleepy. “These aren’t *my* feet,” you remember hearing yourself say when you looked down in surprise at the totally unfamiliar, puffed-up, skin-stretched, blue, mosquito-bitten things attached to your legs. Just then you collapse on the cell floor in a stupor. Epictetus was sounding better all the time:

I ask you, is it possible to avoid men? How can we? Can we change their nature by our society? Who gives us that power? What is left for us then, or what means do we discover to deal with them? We must so act as to leave them to do as seems good to them, while we remain in accord with nature.<sup>9</sup>

Slipping back into the arms of nature was buying you time. Despite your periods of frustrated rage, you had perfected certain “hard to articulate” mental adjustments *within yourself*, keeping you focused only on what was *up to you* in this “black box” of isolation. In exhilarated moments, your dried-out but full-blooming mind would free you from the wheel of life. At last you were learning to use that mind as a deep-probe instrument

rather than as just a defensive scanner keeping your six o'clock clear. Hard to realize, but that had seemed to be its main purpose back there in the years when you were striving for achievement and success in the big, wide world of yackety yack.

Then there was this evolution that bought you still more time while you were running up your record in solitary. It was an evolution you wouldn't have missed, but one that ultimately sent you back into the deep pangs of guilt.

In a surprise move one night you were blindfolded and moved across to the other side of the prison and put in another tiny cell, but in a location where the next morning you *could* hear cell doors being opened and closed in sequence. You had prisoner neighbors! And they had a very clever and clandestine way of communicating by tapping almost silently to each other through the walls. And in due course you learned the code and found yourself doing the same thing and becoming a member of an invisible but very real society.

This was a different slice of life, a chance to "get your head out of the box," not merely through introspection but in helping and loving others, real people. Yes, "loving," for this was the first time in the two years since you'd been captured that you found yourself within earshot of living, breathing, *minds* who shared your predicament. American minds! How many dozens of times in your periods of meditation had you vowed to never again be petty or selfish or mean to one of those wonderful creatures if you should ever again get into contact with one?

And the power of comradeship enveloped you as you came to "know" each member of that society, to learn enough about each person's past and his ideas and attitudes to think of him as a close acquaintance. Especially did you get an appreciation for how each handled the prison life. For much of what was communicated by that tap code to all in the whole society had to do with who was hauled away to the "arena" for punishment and in what particular way had he become ensnared in the network of regulation trip wires. And when he came back, you heard his report of what torture methods were used on him and his warnings about exactly whatever prisoner organizational secrets got forced out of him by the interrogator.

It was the latter matter, how in this invisible society, common danger and goodwill had joined to tear down the barriers of selfishness and vanity, *that* was what took your breath away. These men kept absolutely no secrets from one another! One for all and all for one was really working here. And in the late night in your continuous solitude under the bare bulb you said to yourself more than once: "I love these guys. I am with them to the end."

But you weren't with them to the end. Because in your case, when you got caught in communication and had your turn in the barrel, after the authorities put you through the ropes, and got some of your recent comrades' organizational secrets out of you, they stuck you back in this same old black box in the isolation zone on the other side of the prison. And this came as the worst blow you had had yet.

You couldn't control what you intellectually knew was a product of your runaway imagination: that by not being able to re-enter the bosom of that invisible society and pour out your story as all others had, by not being able to warn them of the damage you had done in losing secrets, you would be singled out for distrust and criticism. They

would surely come to hate you and distrust you. You had lost the only thing you had left: your reputation! The following winter this feeling of guilt stuck with you and brought you worse remorse than you had ever known before. No longer did you brood over just what you thought of as unworthiness of yourself, but over potential physical reprisal you might have brought upon others you had come to love.

You knew that some way all this had to be handled; you couldn't afford a nervous breakdown here. Day after day you would oscillate between the extremes of being morbidly consumed by guilt, generating thoughts you knew to be self-destructive, and then switching to thoughts you knew to be disingenuous, trying to make yourself believe that saying "after all, I *was* tortured" was excuse enough. You knew in your bones that you had to face the truth, and that was the middle ground, somewhere between the two. Finally you sat down in your solitude and did what you had come to know was right: you *dealt* with the guilt, just as you had learned to deal with all the matters you had let be smudged out of your past. You sat there and looked at the facts full in the face and said to yourself, "this is reality, this is it," and thereby *ate* the guilt, if you will, and pledged to use it for what it may have been intended: as a searing flame to cauterize your will, to make you stronger next time.

All this gave you much difficulty and destabilized you considerably. But within a year or so the wounds to your conscience had almost healed, and there you were, sweating out total loneliness as a full-time job again, pressing the limits of your own mind and being exhilarated by it when you could, and venting frustrations on the wasted pain of rebelliousness when you had to. "Open the door, you lazy son of a bitch; we've got to get this bucket dumped!"

What a profound and delicate instrument memory can be when all the sensory and empirical clutter is cleaned away from its lens and you have the time and patience to use it properly, to "see" human nature for what it is! When your mind is in the probing mode, you learn to sneak up on deeply buried matters. And when you get blanked out on the way to your "target shot," you just let your mind drift around the borders lightly and wait for a clue to pop out at you.

As an example, you might proceed something like this: Suppose you are going back to the book of your life to fill in all the pages on your birthdays. It was the summer of 1929. You know it was 1929 because you weren't wearing splints. Your mother had rented Dickinson's pony and cart for your birthday party and you got to drive the pony and you distinctly remember not having your arms encumbered with splints. The splints came in 1930; that had to be the year you started first grade, and so that had to be that summer that you broke both arms falling out of the tree, because you were worried that they wouldn't be off for your first school day. But in 1929 you had to have four kids beside yourself at the party. You were turning five and your mom always said she liked to have the same number of kids as your age, and so far you've only got three besides yourself. Don't push! You're forcing your memory now, and you're squeezing it all back into the black oblivion. Relax, drift, think of something else, and that fourth kid's picture or name will pop out of nowhere when you least expect it.

Wait! I've got a clue. He did something to the pony. What was it?

Damn! That guy's at the door with food now. Interruptions, interruptions; you've got a schedule to keep and it keeps getting interrupted. You don't have a moment to yourself in this place!

Oh Lord, this up-and-down stuff itself gets to you after a while—literally from the sublime to the ridiculous and back and forth. One thing that makes the life so gloomy in here is its being so completely disengaged from nature. The only colors you see for years on end are drab gray and dirty brown. You never get to see the moon or a sunrise or a flower or a blade of grass. Also, why is it that ever since you passed the four-years-in-solitary mark you seem to be on the fringe of a breakdown? You get to shaking and sobbing at the most insignificant reversal, like you had met your goal and are running out of steam. But you must not let that son of a bitch at the peekhole see you in tears or the interrogator will think of another way to get you strung out even farther.

Sure as hell, if you ever do get out of this place, the town's self-appointed "spiritual and patriotic leaders" are going to ask you: What made you hang in there? Oh, they and their buddies will want to hear about God, and they'll want to hear about country, and I wouldn't deny here to *myself* that either idea has not pulled me through some tight periods. But what if I told them about the third leg of this three-legged stool that I've relied on to hold me together: ego, willpower, the refusal to play the role of a victim? That is pure Epictetus. Would they buy that?

A man's master is he who is able to confer or remove whatever that man seeks or shuns. Whoever then would be free, let him wish nothing, let him decline nothing, which depends on others; else he must necessarily be a slave.<sup>10</sup>

Or maybe I could get right to the point and just say I relied on that enigmatic mixture of conscience and egoism called personal honor.<sup>11</sup>

## Afterthoughts

"Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril."  
Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 400 B.C., page 84

A remark made by Sartre to a newcomer, Catholic priest Marius Perrin, in the prison camp in which they were both being held at Trier, Germany, in 1940: "Remember while you're here: the important thing is not what they've done to us; it's what *we* do with what was done to us."

Fr. Marius Perrin, *Avec Sartre au Stalag 12D*, courtesy Dr. Joe Brennan

## Notes

1. Epictetus, *Discourses*, p. 51.
2. *Enchiridion*, Chapter XXVIII.
3. The Geneva Conventions pertaining to treatment of prisoners of war allow for punishments for prisoner violations of legitimate prison camp regulations. According to these conventions, the maximum length of solitary confinement that can be imposed for any crime is thirty days. The Nazis followed international law as a guide to treatment of U.S. prisoners of war during World War II.
4. *In Every War but One*, pp. 88–89.
5. *Enchiridion*, Chapter XVII.
6. Epictetus, *Discourses*, p. 74.
7. “Those POWs who were not subjected to long periods in solitary or isolation believed that multiple tortures were the most effective action taken against them. However, POWs who were subjected to both torture and solitary identified solitary as the specific action that had the most effect on their value system.” Rutledge, “A Comparison Study of Human Values of the Vietnam Prisoners of War Experiencing Long-Term Deprivation” (1974).
8. *The House of the Dead* (1861), p. 8.
9. Epictetus, *Discourses*, p. 33.
10. *Enchiridion*, Chapter XIV.
11. Jacob Burckhardt, *Renaissance in Italy* (1871).





# Appendices

## APPENDIX A

### **“Strength from the Classics,” by Irene Wielawski, October 1978**

*Campus* 7, no. 10 (October 1978), pp. 18–19

This article introduces Stockdale as the Naval War College President and gives a brief overview of his service, including in the Vietnam War. The story begins with his leadership on USS *Oriskany* in the Gulf of Tonkin in April 1965. Drawing from his Stanford philosophy studies in years prior, Stockdale implored his men to draw strength from the classics, especially Epictetus, to serve with a commitment that puts nation and honor above personal concerns. He intended to educate officers to practice moral integrity, starting in the classroom and extending to all arenas of war and conflict, including on the battlefield, while imprisoned, and beyond.

## STRENGTH FROM THE CLASSICS

James Stockdale stood before the pilots of Air Wing 16 aboard the carrier USS *Oriskany* talking about honor, trying to convey to the men he commanded the kind of commitment a soldier must make in the kind of “limited war” the United States had been waging in Vietnam for nearly a year.

“What I am saying,” said Stockdale, “is that national commitment and personal commitment are two different things. All is not relative.

“You can’t avoid black-and-white choices when it comes to personal commitment,” he said, paraphrasing Socrates. “Sooner or later you come to a fork in the road. Don’t equivocate. Don’t rationalize the extent of your commitment with such considerations as ‘Mister, Navy needs you for greater things,’ or ‘you must save the airplane for some great war of the future.’

“When that Fox Flag is two-blocked in the Gulf, you’ll be an actor in a drama that you’ll replay in your mind’s eye for the rest of your life. Level with yourself now,” Stockdale concluded. “Do your duty.”

The date was April 29, 1965. The *Oriskany* was headed for the Gulf of Tonkin, where in a week it would be in the thick of combat. Thirteen of the 120 fliers listening to their commander that day would not return eight months later with the *Oriskany* to San Diego.

Eight would be dead. The rest would be missing. Four of the missing, including Stockdale, would eventually return home.

But between the moment they ejected from their crippled planes and the moment their feet touched American soil would stretch seven and a half years of brutality in Hanoi prisons—years of physical and mental torment, battles with pain, thirst, and hunger and with perhaps more insidious enemies: depression, degradation, and hopelessness.

James Bond Stockdale today is a national hero, holder of the Congressional Medal of Honor, a vice admiral, a commander still, but this time of some of the finest minds the Navy can boast, its future leaders.

As president of the Naval War College in Newport, he can influence how those leaders will handle tomorrow’s crises.

Will they bring a moral commitment to their duties that puts the interests of the nation above those of their careers?

Will they be able to perceive through the myriad procedures of the military bureaucracy the consequences of their decisions?

Will they be thoughtful and imaginative enough to handle crises for which no prescribed formula exists?

Will they understand the principles of duty and honor well enough to be able to uphold them in situations where the rule book does not apply?

These are aspects of leadership Stockdale considers essential and hopes to incorporate into the traditional War College curriculum for senior students.

His vehicle is an electives program to supplement the college's three areas of study: strategy, management, and naval operations. Students next fall will be able to choose electives for up to 20 percent of their course work.

The topics range widely, some focusing on international relations, others on history and law. But by far the most radical is the one Stockdale will teach.

It is called Foundations of Moral Obligation. The catalogue for the 1978–79 school year describes it as a discussion of “right, good, honor, duty, freedom, necessity, law, justice, happiness, insofar as these pertain to the human situation generally and to the military ethos in particular.”

The reading list includes Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Mill, Sartre, Dostoyevsky, Conrad, Koestler, Kafka, Solzhenitsyn, Marx, Emerson, Lenin, and the Old Testament.

“Everyone has a different idea of what I’m trying to do,” laughs Stockdale, rising with surprising agility from his chair, his hands positioning his crippled leg on the floor in a fluid, almost imperceptible motion. The knee was broken twice by his captors, once just after he was shot down and again several years later during an interrogation in Hanoi’s Hoa Lo prison.

“The chaplains think I’m going to do one thing, the Navy hierarchy another. Some say it’s going to be a leadership course.

“It’s not going to be a leadership course. It’s just going to be an excursion through some old-fashioned classics,” he says modestly, if a bit inaccurately. For as the interview progresses, Stockdale returns again and again to these classics, to the strength their teachings gave him in Hoa Lo when his interrogators mercilessly pressed him to turn traitor and when as senior officer in the prison he needed to set an example for others. If they did not give him the techniques of leadership, they certainly gave him the basics.

He waves the reading list as if the books and essays listed there can better explain the course’s objective.

Lenin, for example, in his essay “What Is to Be Done?” shows the power that accrues to “charismatic people,” he says. “Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* shows the ‘moments of panic, moments of great joy, moments of sadness’ that are part of the life of a prisoner.”

“The Grand Inquisitor,” a deeply philosophical passage from Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, sets up a confrontation between an old cardinal dedicated to the Church and Christ, whose miracle-working and insistence on man’s freedom to choose between good and evil threatens the Church’s authority. The cardinal’s response, for the good of the church and the contentment of mankind, is to sentence Christ to death.

Stockdale's military application: "You can be so concerned about saving the ship that you forget you're in the war."

Seven and a half years in prison did not transform Stockdale from a lock-step militarist into a philosopher. He had a philosophical turn of mind long before 57-mm bullets from a North Vietnamese ground gun tore apart the controls of his Skyhawk jet during a "milk run" over Thanh Hoa on September 9, 1965. It was evident on the *Oriskany* the day he went beyond instructing his men about their duty and tried to explain why.

Prison clarified the influences and lessons of his life, he says. He found that a philosophy course he took at Stanford in 1961 gave him more tools to resist his tormentors than all of his military training.

He drew strength from Epictetus, a Roman philosopher who wrote, "It's better to die in hunger, exempt from guilt and fear, than to live in affluence and with perturbation." Perturbation was what Stockdale was living with.

For the searing, maddening question, "Why me, why must I endure this?," he found an answer in the Old Testament story of Job: Life is not fair.

At the same time he found the military's right code of conduct for POWs impossible to uphold under the torture inflicted on prisoners at Hoa Lo. His military training had not covered how an officer must behave when he is confined to a dank, vermin-infested cell, alone—except for brutal contacts with his captors—for years on end.

"In 1965, I was crippled and I was alone," Stockdale wrote in an essay published in the *Atlantic Monthly* last month. "I realized that they had all the power. I couldn't see how I was ever going to get out with my honor and self-respect. The one thing I came to realize was that if you don't lose integrity you can't be had and you can't be hurt."

Integrity for Stockdale became resisting until the pain was unbearable, but never giving in before that point, showing his captors time and again that they could not break his spirit. It meant disfiguring himself so he could not be used in propaganda movies, and risking punishment to tap out encouragement to the man in the next cell.

Integrity isn't what Stockdale has set out to teach, but he hopes the course will lead his students in some thoughtful soul-searching.

## APPENDIX B

### **“Reflections on the Stockdale Legacy,” by Martin L. Cook**

*Naval War College Review* 65, no. 3 (Summer 2012), pp. 7–17

Dr. Cook served as the Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale Professor of Professional Military Ethics at the Naval War College from 2009 to 2016. The reproduced article reprints the Fifteenth Annual Stockdale Lecture, delivered by Cook on 25 January 2012 at the University of San Diego, in California.

# REFLECTIONS ON THE STOCKDALE LEGACY

*Martin L. Cook*

It is a great pleasure and an honor to be invited to deliver this year's Stockdale Lecture. When I consider those who have preceded me in giving this annual lecture, I am truly humbled to be added to that roster. I am also honored to hold an academic chair at the Naval War College that bears Admiral Stockdale's name, so it is especially fitting that I offer some reflections on what my chair's namesake means to me, but more importantly for the Navy.

I am relatively new to the Navy and am still learning its distinctive language and culture. When I went to work for the Navy, one thing struck me immediately—the large number of activities and institutions that bear Admiral Stockdale's name. Here is a list of the ones I know about, and I'm sure it's only partial:

- This annual Stockdale Lecture at San Diego.
- The Stockdale Center for Ethical Leadership at the U.S. Naval Academy, created as a nexus for addressing questions of ethics and character at the Academy.
- The Stockdale Chair of Professional Military Ethics at the Naval War College—my own position.
- The “Stockdale course” at the Naval War College. This is a course I teach with Dr. Tom Gibbons each trimester at Newport. It was originally created by Admiral Stockdale himself when he became the President at the College. The course is called Foundations of Moral Obligation, and in it we study major philosophical traditions of ethics. Admiral Stockdale, as I'm sure many of you know, wrote quite a bit about his belief that his study of philosophy at Stanford—in particular the Roman Stoics—was fundamental to his ability to survive the POW experience.
- The Stockdale Group at the Naval War College, which is a group of senior-class students doing research on ways to improve Navy leader development.
- The Annual Stockdale Leadership Award, two of which are given annually for outstanding leadership, one in the Atlantic Fleet and the other in the Pacific.

I think the most remarkable thing about this list is the underlying point of continuity—that every major institution and activity explicitly dedicated to questions of ethics

and leadership in the U.S. Navy is named after James Bond Stockdale. Indeed, this fact is sometimes a source of considerable confusion. People who see my title, for example, often assume I must be at the Stockdale Center at Annapolis. I'm sure the various other Stockdale institutions and personnel encounter similar confusion.

Perhaps naming such things after Stockdale has been the case so long that we no longer pause to reflect on what a remarkable fact it is. Why would the Navy's culture appear to take it as obvious that anything to do with ethics and leadership should bear the Stockdale name? Of course Admiral Stockdale was a great Navy leader. But there are many great leaders in the history of the Navy. Couldn't even one of the things I mentioned be named after William F. Halsey, Raymond A. Spruance, Chester W. Nimitz, Richmond K. Turner, Stephen Decatur, or Oliver Hazard Perry?

Stockdale is distinct from those other leaders in that much of his courageous leadership occurred while he was a prisoner of war. Furthermore, his character and leadership were tested in extreme circumstances of torture and suffering. Those actions and accounts are noble and inspirational. There is no doubt that Admiral Stockdale exhibited exemplary strength of character and an unbreakable commitment to honor that is to be admired and celebrated. But there's little reason to take the leadership and character revealed in those circumstances and make them somehow normative for naval leadership in general. Great naval leadership will be required in circumstances like his only very rarely (thank God!).

Indeed, Stockdale's last true command was in the grade of commander, as a "CAG," a carrier air group "boss." Between his nearly eight years as a POW and at least one more year repairing his body and writing reports and filing charges against prisoners he believed had violated the Code of Conduct, he was completely outside normal Navy life for nearly ten years. Wouldn't it stand to reason that if we were to look for models of leadership to which future Navy leaders should aspire, Halsey or Spruance would be better and more natural choices, because their leadership under fire was tested in major naval battles? So if it's neither the unique quality of his leadership nor his exemplary conduct as a leader of prisoners of war, what is it about Stockdale that makes it all but self-evident that anything to do with ethics, leadership, and character in the Navy should bear his name?

I believe that ultimately neither his actual leadership in command nor even his strength of character (although those both give credibility to his other work) explain this. I believe his name is associated with leadership and ethics more because of his post-prisoner of war activities. No other great Navy leader and no other former prisoner of war went on to write, think, and speak as widely and deeply about the meaning of all he had been through as did Stockdale. I believe it is the scholar side of the sailor-scholar Stockdale that makes him unique among great Navy leaders.

In recognizing Stockdale as an exemplar of a kind of military virtue, I believe the Navy is implicitly recognizing the importance of the reflective, self-aware, and (dare I say?) philosophical dimensions of the military profession he exemplified and advocated. It is fitting that Stockdale's collection of speeches and essays, portions of which we read every trimester for the first lesson of the Stockdale course, is entitled *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*.

This evening I hope to draw out some of the major threads of Stockdale's philosophy and attempt to apply them to issues in military leadership development now and for

the future. In the end I will argue that although through the recognition the Navy gives Stockdale it acknowledges some very important truths about what's essential in leadership, in practice the Navy and the other services largely fail to make the adjustments and changes in culture and education necessary to make those truths integral to leader development.

Stockdale's written work returns again and again to a few central themes. The first of these he got from the Stoics—that life is not fair. On the face of it, this sounds trivial or banal. But as one thinks more deeply, the point is profound. The central point of Epictetus' *Enchiridion* (the Stoic book that most influenced Stockdale) is that one must reflect deeply on one crucial point, the distinction between what is truly something one can control and all the rest, which one cannot. That seems a blinding flash of the obvious, until you see where Epictetus goes with it. In the end, all one controls is one's inner reaction to events and one's own actions. What one ultimately cannot control is what those events are. As the first sentence of the book reads, "Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, command, and, in one word, whatever are not our own actions." It was this central idea that was vital to Stockdale as a prisoner. Every external aspect of his life was under the control of others. What was done to him and to the other POWs was not "fair"—they all knew the Geneva Convention requirements, and it would be easy to obsess about the Vietnamese flagrant violations of international law.

Further, Stockdale had been flying directly overhead when the second supposed engagement with the destroyer *Turner Joy*, which led to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and therefore the U.S. involvement in the entire Vietnam War, occurred. As he later said, "I had the best seat in the house to watch that event, and our destroyers were just shooting at phantom targets—there were no PT boats there. . . . There was nothing there but black water and American fire power." So to add a still deeper level of unfairness to his situation, Stockdale knew *for a fact* that the legal justification for the war itself, and therefore for the chain of events that had got him where he was as a prisoner, was completely false because the supposed attack had never taken place. He, of course, had been ordered not to disclose this fact, and one of his greatest fears was that under torture he might.

When I thought about this somewhat jarring historical revelation, I realized Stockdale exemplifies an absolutely foundational virtue required and expected of all American soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen—absolute clarity about their roles in a constitutional democracy.

He was a loyal and diligent servant of the American Republic. He wrote in later years that he considered the war both unjustified and poorly conducted, but his clarity about his role is worthy of our reflection—he knew he didn't make policy. He reported what he saw accurately and wrote later of the guilt felt by those who, under pressure, gave false reports of an attack. But having given his honest report, he was crystal clear that he was an agent of policies (even foolish ones) he had not chosen and, unless the orders were illegal, it was not within his purview to evade or modify them.

Perhaps this passage from Epictetus came to his mind: "Remember that you are an actor in a drama, of such a kind as the author pleases to make it. If short, of a short one;

if long, of a long one. If it is his pleasure you should act a poor man, a cripple, a governor, or a private person, see that you act it naturally. For this is your business, to act well the character assigned you; to choose it is another's." For Stockdale, the fundamental military virtue is the tough-mindedness Epictetus requires. One passage in Epictetus consistently shocks my students in the Stockdale course at Newport:

With regard to whatever objects give you delight, are useful, or are deeply loved, remember to tell yourself of what general nature they are, beginning from the most insignificant things. If, for example, you are fond of a specific ceramic cup, remind yourself that it is only ceramic cups in general of which you are fond. Then, if it breaks, you will not be disturbed. If you kiss your child, or your wife, say that you only kiss things which are human, and thus you will not be disturbed if either of them dies.

I suppose what shocks my students is the equation of loss of wives and children with broken crockery (although we all know people who have been undone by as little as a broken cup, too). But anyone who has lived long enough to have experienced loss, failure, and guilt knows there's a profound truth here—that such disasters destroy some people, while others find the inner resilience to pull up their socks and move on. I believe Stockdale would ask us what we're doing to develop such inner resilience in our personnel.

In the face of unfairness, Stockdale's major lesson is that regardless of the situation in which one finds oneself, one must be brutally realistic about what one can and cannot control. His Medal of Honor citation reads as follows:

Recognized by his captors as the leader in the Prisoners' of War resistance to interrogation and in their refusal to participate in propaganda exploitation, Rear Adm. Stockdale was singled out for interrogation and attendant torture. . . . Stockdale resolved to make himself a symbol of resistance regardless of personal sacrifice. He deliberately inflicted a near-mortal wound to his person in order to convince his captors of his willingness to give up his life rather than capitulate. . . . [T]he North Vietnamese . . . , convinced of his indomitable spirit, abated in their employment of excessive harassment and torture toward all of the Prisoners of War.

There is one crucial Stoic observation to make about this citation—that while Stockdale's actions achieved a good result, in that they caused the Vietnamese to change their treatment of prisoners, he didn't do what he did because he counted on that outcome. The outcome he could not control. He did it because of his own internal sense of duty, regardless of the outcome. That he could control. On another occasion he was asked who didn't make it out of Vietnam. He replied as follows:

Oh, that's easy, the optimists. Oh, they were the ones who said, "We're going to be out by Christmas." And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, "We're going to be out by Easter." And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart. . . . This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that

you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.

So what are the implications for today's military leaders if we take Stockdale seriously to heart? I believe we'd have to rebalance the focus on technical and operational expertise (which is where almost all our focus is today) with explicit discussion and development on the seemingly "soft" (dare I say philosophical?) internal intellectual and personal development of our people. In crisis, it's not technical knowledge or operational experience alone that sees us through. It's inner resilience and strength. Stockdale has very clear ideas about how best to develop that strength.

Stockdale himself took the initiative to study philosophy "on the side," when the Navy sent him to Stanford for a two-year course in history and economics to prepare him for future responsibilities in policy making. He grew frustrated with his courses in those subjects. He noticed that whenever he asked a question that seemed genuinely interesting to him, the professor would cut off the conversation, saying, "Now we're getting into philosophy." That motivated Stockdale, against the advice of his adviser, to cross over to the philosophy department and begin course work there.

When he departed Stanford, his favorite professor of philosophy gave him a copy of the *Enchiridion*. He admits that when he looked at it his first reaction was that it was totally irrelevant to him as a man of action, but he read it out of respect for his professor. Only later, in the crucible, did Epictetus' words come to life and become his salvation. Nobody in the Navy and nothing in the Navy's concept of how to develop officers had ever so much as suggested that he have the very educational experience he credits with saving his life. Nothing the Navy had given, offered, or required of him as a developing officer did anything to give Stockdale the foundation his character needed to be ready to endure what would be required of him. That was entirely his initiative, undertaken at personal cost of additional work and effort for self-development.

When in busy military deployments do we find time for professional development beyond focusing on technical mastery? When would the captain of a ship invite the wardroom to a discussion of Stoicism over dinner? When, for example, do Surface Warfare Officers (SWOs) during their division-officer tours lift their horizons beyond getting their formal SWO qualification to think more fundamentally about officership and their deep self-understanding as military professionals?

I think Stockdale would suggest it shouldn't be a crazy suggestion that these things happen. Indeed, he would fear that officers who lack such inner depth, regardless of their technical and operational skill, are missing something fundamental, perhaps something that might save their lives or allow them to maintain their integrity under extreme pressure. He might, for example, look at the Army's great efforts to reground the professional ethic through the Center for the Army Profession and Ethics (see its website at [www.cape.army.mil](http://www.cape.army.mil)) and the Army's sustained attention to issues of ethics and professionalism in recent years as something the other services would benefit from studying and emulating.

In one chapter in *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*, Stockdale recounts a conversation he had with an NBC executive who afterward became a lifelong friend. The executive criticized the usual press approach to political candidates, quizzing them on

their positions on specific issues of the day. The executive went on to say that because those issues shift rapidly, the opinions of the moment would in the end be meaningless as a guide to what politicians would actually do in office. Stockdale reflected back on the conversation (with which he heartily agreed):

Character is probably more important than knowledge. . . . Of course, all things being equal, knowledge is to be honored. . . . But what I'm saying is that whenever I've been in trouble spots—in crises (and I've been in a lot of trouble and in a lot of crises)—the sine qua non of a leader has lain not in his chesslike grasp of issues and the options they portend, not in his style of management, not in his skill at processing information, but in his having the character, the heart, to deal spontaneously, honorably, and candidly with people, perplexities, and principles.\*

This invites the question of how we appropriate the Stockdale legacy. Where do we consciously and explicitly strive to develop this resilient, self-aware, and philosophically informed character in our officers? Is the weight of the technical and operational knowledge essential to successful operation of ships, aircraft, and submarines, companies, and battalions being balanced with attention to self-awareness, character, and the clarity of philosophical thought Stockdale here stresses?

There is also a danger in raising the necessity of character development in the “can-do” culture of a military service. If the question is taken to be serious, there is the risk of a typical military response—establishing a new program to ensure that character is developed. To some degree, all of the service academies have in fact done this, creating “character development” bureaucracies that grow like weeds and generate motivational-speaker-level events of dubious value.

I doubt that Stockdale would have much use with those programmatic responses. He would say what is required is exposure to deep thought and internalized self-reflection of the sort that only intellectually rigorous examination can provide. While motivational-speaker character development can provide brief and perhaps exciting passing moments, what Stockdale is looking for runs far deeper.

It is beautifully described in Plato's discussion of the training of the Auxiliaries in his ideal Republic. The Auxiliaries are where the virtue of courage resides in the Republic. They are that part of the city that takes to the field to defend it. They are the professional military. Plato says they must have internalized utterly unshakable convictions that they are to be obedient to the laws of the lawmakers, regardless of pain, pleasure, desire, or fear. To achieve this, much more than motivational speaking will be required. Plato describes it as follows:

The dyers, when they want to dye wool purple, first choose from all the colors the single nature belonging to white things; then they prepare it beforehand and care for it with no little preparation so that it will most receive the color; and it is only then that they dye. And if a thing is dyed in this way, it becomes color-fast, and washing either without lyes or with lyes can't take away its color. . . .

\*James B. Stockdale, *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1995), pp. 31–32. All subsequent page references are to this work.

To the extent of our power, [we are] doing something similar when we selected the soldiers and educated them. . . . [T]hey should receive the laws from us in the finest possible way like a dye, so that their opinion about what's terrible and about everything else would be color-fast because they had gotten the proper nature and rearing, and their dye could not be washed out by those lyes so terribly effective at scouring: pleasure . . . and pain, fear, and desire. . . . This kind of power and preservation, through everything, of the right and lawful opinion about what is terrible and what not, I call courage. (*Republic*, Book IV)

Stockdale, I'm pretty sure, would have embraced that definition of courage from Plato: "This kind of power and preservation, through everything, of the right and lawful opinion about what is terrible and what not." What is the process of dyeing the soul so deeply that it gains that power? The first and critical aspect of the Stockdale legacy is to invite us to ask that question deeply.

Another of Stockdale's recurrent themes is the importance of what he calls at various times "the pressure cooker," or the "crucible." He worried that plebe year at Annapolis had gotten too easy because of misguided attempts to reduce stress on midshipmen. He feared that education had lost some of the rigor necessary for knowledge to seep deeply into the soul.

Joseph Brennan, a philosopher who taught the first iterations of the Stockdale course at the Naval War College with Stockdale, wrote an essay in which he reflected on their collaboration. He says they began the course with a concept central to Stockdale's thought: "The alchemical transformation that may occur when a human being is subjected to intense pressure with a crucible of suffering of confinement" (p. 171). It is important to note that Stockdale did not especially want to call this course an "ethics" course. Indeed, he was quite skeptical about the explosion of ethics courses being offered in business, dental, and medical schools throughout the land. As Brennan put it, "He did not want his course to be the military equivalent of what he called 'ethics for dentists'" (p. 170). The danger, he feared, was that ethics would be reduced to a branch of psychology. Instead, he deeply believed that only rigorous examination of the classics of the humanities would provide the real depth required. To read deeply in Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Nietzsche was to show students that "much of what goes by the name social science serves up ideas expressed earlier and better in classical philosophy and modern literature" (p. 170).

If Stockdale is right about this, I think it poses a fundamental challenge to the culture of military education at virtually all levels. Let me cite the example I know best from my time at the Air Force Academy. The Air Force Academy (like all the academies, to various degrees) is, at its heart, an engineering school. As an extreme example, I once got into a fairly long argument with the Air Force officer charged with reporting the research being done by the Academy's faculty. The metric he insisted on using was that only externally funded research projects (all of which fell in the engineering and science departments) even counted as research. I pointed out repeatedly that, using that metric, no publications in philosophy, literature, history, or social science would ever even appear in the "research report" of the institution. I lost the argument, by the way.

To take another example: cadets sharply distinguish two types of courses. Some are “real” subjects—math, science, and engineering. All the rest are “fuzzies”—not a term of approbation. Fuzzies include history, literature, and philosophy—not to mention art or music.

Or to work farther down the career path, what role do subjects in the humanities play in Professional Military Education curricula at all levels? Even if we leave aside the purely technical schools, which focus on teaching specific skills, there is virtually nothing. I taught in a department at the Army War College called Command, Leadership, and Management. There were two whole lessons dealing with ethics in the curriculum. But the real heart of the department was focused on the Defense Department budget process, mind-bogglingly difficult charts on the planning, budgeting, and execution process; various “flavor of the month” management theories; and notional-force-structure planning exercises.

I don’t mean for a minute to suggest these are not things senior officers need to know; many of these students would be managing those complex systems in the not-too-distant future. But the results-oriented and pragmatic mind-set cultivated by military culture is generally impatient with anything that isn’t immediately and practically relevant.

By contrast with that approach, consider Stockdale’s reflections on the Stockdale course’s effects on students:

We studied moral philosophy by looking at models of human beings under pressure, their portraits drawn from the best materials we could find in philosophy and literature. The professional implications for military men and women followed. We did not have to draw diagrams [or, one might add, PowerPoint slides]; the military implications came up naturally in seminar discussions. (p. 171)

These seem to me the main elements of the Stockdale legacy—the importance of a deeply reflective self-understanding, grounded in a clear-eyed and realistic appreciation of oneself and the world in which one acts. It stresses the central importance of character and, indeed, its primacy over technical knowledge and practical know-how. Most counterculturally of all for the military, Stockdale asserts that serious reading of the humanities is the single most important means to developing those attributes, because only such reading addresses fundamental human questions with rigor and depth.

If we were truly to take Stockdale seriously and live up to the intuitions that have caused so many Navy institutions to borrow his name and authority, we would have to rethink a great deal about military culture, military education, and officer development. Or in the end does Stockdale play for the Navy and the other services the role of so many other saints and heroes throughout history, that of objects of veneration but not examples to be followed, not people whose teachings we truly heed? Are we content to relegate Stockdale to portraits on the wall, plaster statues of the saint, and eponymous programs that only scratch the surface? I submit we do him a great disservice if we don’t take seriously the thoughts of this deeply philosophical fighter pilot.

For those in the Reserve Officer Training Corps and junior officers who are in the audience tonight, a special word. You are at the threshold of self-sacrificial service to our nation. When you swear your oath to the Constitution of the United States, you give up a good deal of moral autonomy and commit to discipline your mind and body to be prepared to meet the unpredictable, but certain, challenges your profession will send your way. Stockdale's message to you would be, don't sell yourselves short. Don't be content to remain on the surface and focus only on knowledge and skill. His example should lead you to take every opportunity (and make them if you aren't given them) to think deeply and broadly. When someone tells you, "Well, we're getting into philosophy here," don't take that as a reason to get back to the practical. Take it as the challenge to press right on. As Socrates put it twenty-five hundred years ago, "The unexamined life is not worth leading." And as the words over the entrance to the Delphic oracle reminded everyone in the classical world, γνῶθι σεαυτόν—*gnothi seauton*, "know thyself."

I'd like to close with Admiral Stockdale's description of his parachute descent into seven and a half years of hell:

On September 9, 1965, I flew at 500 knots right into a flak trap, at tree-top level, in a little A-4 airplane—the cockpit walls not even three feet apart—which I couldn't steer after it was on fire, its control system shot out. After ejection I had about thirty seconds to make my last statement in freedom before I landed in the main street of a little village right ahead. And so help me, I whispered to myself, "Five years down there, at least. I'm leaving the world of technology and entering the world of Epictetus." (p. 189)

The "training" that saved Stockdale's life was a slim volume written by a Roman slave-philosopher in the second century. What would it mean for Professional Military Education if we thought deeply about Stockdale's message? And even more importantly, what would it mean for all of you who wear the uniform of the United States of America?

## APPENDIX C

### **“Remarks, Stockdale to Pilots, 1965,” by Martin L. Cook**

*Naval War College Review* 70, no. 3 (Summer 2017), pp. 140–43

In this feature, Martin L. Cook contextualizes and presents Admiral Stockdale’s remarks to the pilots of Carrier Air Wing 16 while they were en route to the Gulf of Tonkin on 29 April 1965.

# REMARKS, STOCKDALE TO PILOTS, 1965

*Martin L. Cook*

In *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*, his collection of reflective essays published long after his time in Vietnam, Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale writes eloquently about the importance of the study of philosophy in helping him to endure the prisoner of war (POW) experience. While at Stanford completing a degree in economics, he found his most important questions being deflected by the economics faculty, often with the remark, “Well, we’re getting into philosophy now.” Exasperated by that reaction, Stockdale found his way to the Philosophy Department and embarked on a course of reading in the subject, guided by Professor Philip H. Rhineland.

As Stockdale was leaving Stanford, Rhineland gave him a copy of the work on Roman Stoicism by the freed slave–philosopher Epictetus, which Stockdale read (he says) initially only out of respect for Rhineland. But Epictetus’s thoughts clearly stuck with him and, in the end, helped him find the resiliency and determination to endure the POW experience honorably. The key tenet of Stoic philosophy is the distinction between what one can control (only one’s own actions and inner reactions to things) and what one cannot (the actions of others and the unavoidable circumstances life brings).

Although written well before Stockdale began his POW experience, this speech to his aircrews en route to Vietnam demonstrates the degree to which he already was thinking about and articulating what they were about to undergo in Stoic terms. His discussion about moving up bomb-release altitudes or adding fuel reflects exactly the Stoic notion of accepting the mission one is given, realistically and uncomplainingly. His unflinching dismissal of “Hollywood answers” and straightforward recognition that, as military officers, his listeners do not get to pick, or even to some degree judge, the war to which they are assigned are a perfect illustration of recognizing what is within one’s own powers and what is not. It recognizes that political decisions about where military force is used are “above the pay grade” of his officers.

Stockdale reminds his listeners, “[Y]ou [are] an actor in a drama that you’ll replay in your mind’s eye for the rest of your life.” In other words, you are not the playwright, but how you perform in the play rests entirely in your hands. In this remark, he is virtually paraphrasing Epictetus (*Enchiridion* 17): “Remember that you are an actor in a drama, of such a kind as the author pleases to make it. If short, of a short one; if long, of a long one. If it is his pleasure you should act a poor man, a cripple, a governor, or a private person, see that you act it naturally. For this is your business, to act well the character assigned you; to choose it is another’s.”

So, in this short address, we see Stockdale the Stoic warrior attempting to impart Stoic wisdom to his aircrews. It is the perfect illustration of the “operationalization” of the importance of philosophy that he will write about years later with such eloquence. But already, here, he is attempting to help his aircrews steel themselves mentally to accept the war and the missions assigned to them unflinchingly, realistically, without illusions. He is, as the Stoics would say, leading them to live “in accordance with Nature” (*kata phusin*) by calling things what they are and calmly facing what lies before them.

*Remarks of wing commander James B. Stockdale to the pilots of Carrier Air Wing 16 aboard USS Oriskany, at sea en route to the Gulf of Tonkin, on April 29, 1965, one week before they entered combat. Presented as found in the archives of the Naval War College. Excerpted version available in U. S. Grant Sharp, Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect (Presidio, 1978).*

Having reviewed for you the terrain of Vietnam, the enemy’s order of battle, the rules of engagement, and to some extent the modern history of the conflict and the evolution of America’s strategy, I think I owe you in addition a straight-from-the-shoulder discussion of pilots’ mental attitudes and orientation in “limited war” circumstances. I saw the need for this last summer aboard *Ticonderoga*—after the start of the war had caught us by surprise and we had gone through those first, exciting days pretty much on adrenaline. In the lull that followed, as we prepared for a next round, I could sense that those fine young men who had measured up so well in the sudden reality of flak and burning targets wanted to talk and get their resources and value systems lined up for the long haul. Like most of you, they were well read, sensitive, sometimes skeptical—those educated in the American liberal tradition to think for themselves—those who are often our most productive citizens and, just as often, our best soldiers. They realized that bombing heavily defended targets is serious business and no game—that it is logically impossible, in the violence of a fight, to commit oneself as an individual only in some proportion of his total drive and combative instinct. It has to be all or nothing; dog eat dog over the target. I think they were asking themselves, as you might—Where do I as a person, a person of awareness, refinement, and education, fit into this “limited war,” “measured response” concept?

I want to level with you right now, so you can think it over here in mid-Pacific and not kid yourself into imagining “stark realizations” in the Gulf of Tonkin. Once you go “feet dry” over the beach, there can be nothing limited about your commitment. “Limited war” means to us that our target list has limits, our ordnance loadout has limits, our rules of engagement have limits, but that does not mean that there is anything

“limited” about our personal obligations as fighting men to carry out assigned missions with all we’ve got. If you think it is possible for a man, in the heat of battle, to apply something less than total personal commitment—equated perhaps to your idea of the proportion of national potential being applied—you are wrong. It’s contrary to human nature. So also is the idea I was alarmed to find suggested to me by a military friend in a letter recently: that the prisoner of war’s Code of Conduct is some sort of a “total war” document. You can’t go halfway on that, either. The Code of Conduct was not written for “total wars” or “limited wars,” it was written for all wars, and let it be understood that it applies with full force to this air wing, in this war.

What I am saying is that national commitment and personal commitment are two different things. All is not relative. You classical scholars know that even the celebrated “free thinker” Socrates was devoted to ridiculing the sophist idea that one can avoid black and white choices in arriving at personal commitments; one sooner or later comes to a fork in the road. As Harvard’s philosophy great Alfred North Whitehead said: “I can’t bring half an umbrella to work when the weatherman predicts a 50 percent chance of rain.” We are all at the fork in the road this week. Think it over. If you find yourself rationalizing about moving your bomb-release altitude up a thousand feet from where your strike leader briefs it, or adding a few hundred pounds fuel to your over-target bingo because “the Navy needs you for greater things,” or you must save the airplane for some “great war” of the future, you, you’re in the wrong outfit. You owe it to yourself to have a talk with your skipper or me. It’s better for both you and your shipmates that you face up to your fork in the road here at 140 degrees east rather than later, two thousand miles west of here, on the line.

Let us all face our prospects squarely. We’ve got to be prepared to obey the rules and contribute without reservation. If political or religious conviction helps you do this, so much the better, but you’re still going to be expected to press on, with or without these comforting thoughts, simply because this uniform commits us to a military ethic—the ethic of personal pride and excellence that alone has supported some of the greatest fighting men in history. Don’t require Hollywood answers to “What are we fighting for?” We’re here to fight because it’s in the interest of the United States that we do so. This may not be the most dramatic way to explain it, but it has the advantage of being absolutely correct.

I hope I haven’t made this too somber. I merely want to let you all know first of all where this wing stands on “Duty, Honor, Country.” Secondly, I want to warn you all of excessive caution. A philosopher has warned us that, of all forms of caution, caution in love is the most fatal to true happiness. When that Fox flag is two-blocked in the Gulf, you’ll be an actor in a drama that you’ll replay in your mind’s eye for the rest of your life. Level with yourself now. Do your duty.

*Footnote: No one came forward with reservations. By the time Oriskany returned to San Diego in December 1965, its pilots had earned a record total of military decorations for Vietnam carrier deployments. Of the 120 pilots addressed in this talk, thirteen did not return to the ship: eight were killed in action, one is still unaccounted for, and four—including the speaker—spent seven and a half years as POWs in Hanoi.*

## APPENDIX D

### **“Foundations of Moral Obligation: After Forty Years,” by Thomas J. Gibbons**

*Naval War College Review* 70, no. 3 (Summer 2017), pp. 121–39

In this article, Dr. Gibbons provides a history of the Naval War College elective Foundations of Moral Obligation, which Admiral Stockdale created and taught. The course has been taught at the College continuously since 1978.

# FOUNDATIONS OF MORAL OBLIGATION

## After Forty Years

*Thomas J. Gibbons*

In these times of ethical uncertainty, especially among senior Navy leaders amid the ongoing “Fat Leonard” fiasco, we need to look to our roots. The Foundations of Moral Obligation elective, otherwise known as “The Stockdale Course,” has been a mainstay at the Naval War College (NWC) for most of the past forty years. Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale, USN, the fortieth President of the College, collaborated with Dr. Joseph Brennan, a professor emeritus from Columbia University’s Barnard College, to develop the elective shortly after Stockdale assumed the presidency. Little did they know how popular the elective would become and the positive impact it would have on graduates over the years. The Foundations elective has become a part of the moral fabric of both the institution and the U.S. Navy.

One indication of this is that NWC’s formal role in both leadership and ethics has expanded relatively recently. Then–Chief of Naval Operations Jonathan W. Greenert approved the first Navy Leader Development Strategy in January 2013 to “synchronize the Navy’s leadership and strengthen our naval profession by providing a common framework for leader development.”<sup>1</sup> In early 2014, Greenert directed the President of the Naval War College to be responsible for all officer and enlisted leadership and ethics curricula for the Navy.<sup>2</sup> A few months later, in March 2014, the Naval Leadership and Ethics Center was created at Naval Station Newport to provide leadership education and training, curriculum support, research, and assessment.<sup>3</sup> With their Foundations elective, Stockdale and Brennan laid the foundation for leadership and ethics instruction at the Naval War College, and their work continues to have a profound impact on leaders throughout the Navy today.

Stockdale and Brennan wrote the Foundations syllabus and cobbled together the reading list and assignments in about six months during the first half of 1978. The course was offered for the first time in the fall trimester of academic year (AY) 1978–79, then was taught again during the winter trimester that same academic year. Stockdale himself only taught the course that bears his name for one year (actually two trimesters). Brennan continued to teach the elective until he retired in 1992. Professor Paul Regan began teaching the Foundations elective in the fall trimester of 1994 while on active duty as a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) captain. He retired from the Coast Guard the following year, but continued to teach the Foundations elective for the next sixteen years, through 2010. Dr. Martin L. Cook assumed duties as the Stockdale Chair at the Naval War College in June 2009 and cotaught the elective with the author until his retirement in 2016. Each of these men brought passion and vigor into the classroom to make the course successful.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this article is to highlight the history of the Foundations of Moral Obligation elective and to illustrate how it has changed over time—and yet how much it has remained the same. The article also will attempt to answer the question of why this elective has remained one of the most popular at the College. It seems deeply counter-intuitive, on the face of it, that midgrade and senior military officers and government civilians—a group typically educated in technology and management and focused on the practical—would find the reading of difficult primary sources in philosophy and literature such an important part of their NWC education.

Stockdale graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy with the class of 1947. His classmates include former president Jimmy Carter; Senator John McCain; and Admiral Stansfield Turner, USN (Ret.), who later became director of the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>5</sup> While serving as President of the College, Turner made sweeping changes to improve the curriculum, based on his experience as a Rhodes Scholar. In fact, many of the improvements instituted during the “Turner Revolution” are still in effect today. Stockdale, having spent nearly seven and a half years as a prisoner of war at the infamous Hanoi Hilton, came to Newport intent on making an impact and establishing an elective course in ethics. In a letter to Brennan dated December 5, 1977, Stockdale wrote, “I have come to the conclusion that if I am to leave a legacy here it must be done from the classroom. My boss, Jim Holloway, and my predecessor, Stan Turner, and others advise against ‘getting tied down’ to a lecture schedule. I’m going to ignore their warnings—and try, by next fall, to structure an elective course in something like ethics.”<sup>6</sup>

The Stockdale legacy of leadership and ethics has grown exponentially throughout the U.S. Navy over the years. As Dr. Cook highlighted, “I think the most remarkable thing . . . [is] that every major institution and activity explicitly dedicated to questions about ethics and leadership in the U.S. Navy is named after James Bond Stockdale.”<sup>7</sup> Stockdale’s legacy in leadership and ethics throughout the U.S. Navy is unquestionable. However, he was not always interested in ethics.

## The Influence of Epictetus

After his graduation from the Naval Academy, Stockdale pursued tough operational Navy assignments. He eventually attended flight training and became a fighter pilot and

later an experimental test pilot. In 1960, he was selected to attend graduate school for two years at Stanford University to get a master's degree. While at Stanford, Stockdale wandered over to the halls of the Philosophy Department one morning. He became enamored of philosophy, although his academic adviser tried to discourage him, telling him it was a waste of time.

We all experience moments like these, those crossroads at which we choose a path that fundamentally changes the course of our lives. This visit to the Philosophy Department was a life-changing moment for Stockdale. That morning he met a USN veteran of World War II, Professor Philip Rhinelander, who was teaching in the Philosophy Department after a long and distinguished academic career. Rhinelander took Stockdale under his wing, enrolled him in his course, and over the next few weeks tutored him privately. Stockdale thrived, and even took additional philosophy courses from other professors at Stanford.<sup>8</sup>

In their last meeting together prior to his graduation, Rhinelander gave Stockdale a copy of Epictetus's handbook, *The Enchiridion*.<sup>9</sup> Stockdale was dumbfounded, but took the book and read it, out of respect for Rhinelander. In a letter to Brennan years later, Stockdale confessed, "I recognized nothing that applied to the career I had known. I was a fighter pilot, an organizer, a motivator of young aviators, a martini drinker, a golf player, a technologist—and this ancient rag talked about not concerning oneself with matters over which he had no control, etc. I thought to myself, 'Poor old Rhinelander—he's just too far gone.'"<sup>10</sup>

Little did Stockdale know that this small book would be his salvation, his source of strength in the prison camps of North Vietnam. Stockdale would embrace the Stoic philosophy and make it his own. He would write essays and deliver speeches to audiences throughout the country. In fact, years later as President of the College, he often began his remarks to students with the phrase "Remember, life is not fair. Once you accept that, you can move on."<sup>11</sup>

Epictetus's teachings and the Stoic philosophy would play a major role in Stockdale's life, especially while he was imprisoned in North Vietnam. He wrote to Brennan, "My 'secret weapon' was the security I felt in anchoring my resolve to those selected portions of philosophic thought that emphasized human dignity and self-respect. Epictetus certainly taught that."<sup>12</sup> While in prison, Stockdale lived in the world of Epictetus and applied the lessons and teachings from *The Enchiridion* to survive. "The Stoic philosopher Epictetus was foremost among my consolations in the pressure cooker of Hanoi."<sup>13</sup>

After his release from prison in 1973, Stockdale spent nearly a year in recovery healing his physical wounds—and pressing charges against fellow prisoners who had collaborated with the enemy and violated the Code of Conduct. Stockdale wrote, "To the Stoic, the greatest injury that can be inflicted on a person is administered by himself when he destroys the good man within him."<sup>14</sup> Stockdale argued that the collaborators had betrayed the trust of their fellow prisoners and deserved punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice; however, the U.S. government took no action against the collaborators and eventually allowed them to retire. In 1976, Stockdale became a national hero and received the Medal of Honor for his service in Vietnam, which included spending almost seven and a half years as a prisoner of war, much of it in solitary confinement.<sup>15</sup>

## Stockdale and Brennan

In 1975, Dr. Joseph Brennan was teaching philosophy at Columbia University. He became intrigued by what he read about Stockdale and his study of Epictetus and the Stoics. He sent Stockdale a letter asking how philosophy had given him inner strength throughout his time as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. Brennan subsequently requested to add Stockdale's lengthy response to an upcoming book he was writing. This exchange laid the groundwork for a friendship that would endure for the rest of their lives.<sup>16</sup>

Stockdale took command of the Naval War College as its fortieth President on October 13, 1977. Shortly after taking over, he contacted both Brennan and Rhinelander to get their assistance with and feedback on his proposed philosophy course. Although they had corresponded by letter for almost two years, Stockdale and Brennan did not meet until the change of command. In a letter to Brennan dated December 5, 1977, shortly after taking command, Stockdale wrote, "What are the philosophic roots of a military profession? What are the watershed distinctions that separate bureaucrats from warriors, winners from losers? I know this is no simple matter to get a layman up to speed to teach such sensitive material—but I want my students to have something more than a few mutually contradictory slogans when their backs are against the wall. . . . I need a theme, a recommended reading list, and a lot of time to think."<sup>17</sup>

Brennan visited Newport and the College again over the Christmas holidays in 1977. He met with Stockdale several times during the visit to discuss the proposed ethics course. Brennan was on track to accept a position in India with the State Department, but turned it down when Stockdale offered him a part-time job as his assistant to develop and teach the course. In a letter to a friend dated January 21, 1978, Brennan wrote as follows:

My job title is Consultant to the President, term: 11 months of 1978; my duties include preparing the course, getting up a reading list, conferring with the admiral until 17 August when my wife and I will move to Newport for the 16 weeks that the class runs. I'll be on standby to give classes when the admiral is called away. The hardest part will be to prepare the course—it's easy enough to do that for oneself, but when somebody, who is not a professional, is to teach it, that's a new one for me.<sup>18</sup>

Brennan immediately went to work preparing the course. In his undated NWC journal notes, Brennan wrote, "When I suggested I'd like to visit classes and talk to other faculty, he [Stockdale] said, 'Don't pay too much attention to those guys.'"<sup>19</sup>

As the new President of the College, Stockdale spent time reviewing the curricula for all courses. He was concerned about what he found, and decided to implement electives for all students during the following AY, 1979–80. In a letter to Brennan dated January 13, 1978, he wrote as follows:

I've created quite a stir with the Departments, asking for electives—not only for myself—but for Constitutional Law, Soviet foreign policy, etc. I'm telling 'em that I can drive a truck through the Gaps our three departments leave in the educational base

for mid-career officers and that the option is to let me supervise a broad electives program or move over and give me 25 percent of the room for *my 4th* department (Philosophy & Law—or whatever). The profs *Love* it; the Administrators are adapting.<sup>20</sup> [emphasis original]

Stockdale was passionate about implementing changes to make sure the curriculum and the faculty met the needs of its graduates, then and in the future. The existing curriculum did not address any of the things that Stockdale had found most valuable during his time as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam. As Stockdale noted, “No philosophical survival kits are issued’ when man goes to war.”<sup>21</sup>

Stockdale and Brennan both spent long hours trying to decide on an appropriate name for the course they would teach. As Brennan noted, “Stockdale did not like the word *ethics*. He thought the contemporary ‘ethics explosion’ had eroded the older, nobler sense of the word. He knew that ethics courses were spreading rapidly, not only in military institutions but also in business, industry, and the professions.”<sup>22</sup> Stockdale thought that the term *moral philosophy* was more suitable because it tied into the humanities.<sup>23</sup> Stockdale and Brennan finally agreed on the course title Foundations of Moral Obligation. But they spent many additional hours deciding on the absolute best readings and lessons for the course. In a letter to a friend dated January 21, 1978, Brennan wrote: “I do know that he is interested in anything that has to do with prison camps—he is trying to get Alex. Solzhenitsyn up to the War College for a lecture. He also wants to put some literary works on his reading list, and mentioned Camus. Since he, Stockdale, is an enemy of bureaucracy, I thought that something of Kafka might do. Even *Darkness at Noon* occurred to me as a possibility. . . . If you have any suggestions, I’d be grateful.”<sup>24</sup>

In a letter to a friend dated February 5, 1978, Brennan wrote as follows:

I spent this last long weekend, Thursday through Saturday, with Adm Stockdale at Newport and Providence. . . . He is a very intense, very attractive man. . . . We now have a course title, “The Foundations of Moral Obligation,” as well as a tentative reading list which includes the Book of Job, the Socratic Dialogues of Plato, selections from Aristotle’s *Ethics*, Kant’s *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Mill’s *Utilitarianism*, Sartre on Existentialism, as well as fiction readings including Conrad’s *Typhoon*, Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, Kafka’s *Trial* . . . and Solzhenitsyn’s *Ivan Denisovich*.<sup>25</sup>

Stockdale and Brennan finalized the course readings and syllabus during the spring of 1978 and prepared to offer the elective during the fall trimester.

## The Stockdale-Brennan Era

Neither Stockdale nor Brennan knew how well the new course would be received by students once they actually started teaching. Both worked diligently to ensure that the syllabus, reading list, and subsequent seminar discussions would provide valuable information to midgrade military officers in search of a moral compass. Brennan wrote,

"Through the winter, spring, and summer of 1978, Admiral Stockdale and I met frequently for intensive discussions concerning the organization of the course."<sup>26</sup> Stockdale fervently believed the course would fill a void in the students' careers. He told a reporter, "Today's ranks are filled with officers who have been weaned on slogans and fads of the sort preached in the better business schools—that rational managerial concepts will cure all evils. This course is my defense against the buzz-word-nomograph-acronym mentality."<sup>27</sup>

In an address he gave at Trinity Church in Newport on Sunday, May 7, 1978, for Rhode Island's Independence Day, Stockdale used material from the upcoming course in his remarks. Stockdale highlighted both Viktor E. Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning* and Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* to illustrate the importance of freedom to the individual.<sup>28</sup>

The news of Stockdale's Foundations of Moral Obligation course spread quickly to the Navy Staff. A retired Navy captain who was in the first seminar shared the following: "By early 1978, the word on the street around DC was that this course is a 'must take' if you wanted to think deeply about the business you were in and were lucky enough to get orders to the War College."<sup>29</sup> Stockdale's reputation as a Medal of Honor recipient, along with Brennan's prowess as a scholar, fueled the media blitz. The fact that they were team-teaching a philosophy course for military students, many with recent combat experience in Vietnam, added to the attractiveness for the media. Brennan wrote, "Word got around that a Vietnam war hero with the Medal of Honor was teaching a course in moral philosophy at the Naval War College, and the media moved in with tape recorders, television cameras, and fast-writing reporters."<sup>30</sup>

The initial seminar, offered in the fall 1978 trimester, was capped at fifty students. The second offering was in the winter trimester; it had thirty-five students and fifteen auditors. Brennan related that the students idolized Stockdale, so there was no difficulty filling all the seats.<sup>31</sup> The course was designed for Stockdale and Brennan each to deliver one-hour lectures on Wednesday afternoon, followed by a one-and-a-half-hour seminar discussion on Thursday afternoon. The elective met for ten weeks during the trimester. Stockdale intended to use original classics material along with popular novels, and he created a challenging reading list.<sup>32</sup> Stockdale said, "We studied moral philosophy by looking at models of human beings under pressure, their portraits drawn from the best materials we could find in philosophy and literature."<sup>33</sup> The syllabus included the following:

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Week One   | Introduction. The Prisoner of War and the Human Predicament. The World of Epictetus. |
| Week Two   | The Book of Job and the Problem of Evil.   |
| Week Three | The Socratic Example. Four Platonic Dialogues.                                       |
| Week Four  | Aristotle and the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> .  |
| Week Five  | Law: Of Conscience and the State. Kant and Hart.                                     |
| Week Six   | Happiness as Utility; Justice and Fairness. Mill and Rawls.                          |

- Week Seven Individualism and the Collective I. Emerson; Sartre; Camus.
- Week Eight Individualism and the Collective II. Lenin and Soviet Philosophy.
- Week Nine Science and Values. Monod and the Moral Ideal of Objective Knowledge. Wittgenstein and the Ethic of Silence.
- Week Ten Return to the Beginning. The Stoic Ideal and the Ethic of the Military.<sup>34</sup>

Each student took a midterm and a final examination and submitted a short paper. The weekly readings were difficult for the students, especially those without a background in philosophy. However, the seminar discussions allowed Stockdale and Brennan to interact with students and facilitate the learning process. Moreover, the elective gave students an opportunity to expand their horizons and to read and discuss material they never would have read on their own.

During the first academic year it was offered, the Foundations elective received high ratings from students. In fact, in a report to the President of the Naval War College, Brennan related that it “ranked highest of the 18 electives offered, topped only by FE-117, a course in advanced electronic warfare.”<sup>35</sup> Student evaluations ranged from 6.19 to 6.58 on a 7-point Likert scale.<sup>36</sup> Overall, the initial offering was very successful. Brennan related that one of the few negative comments was that “[t]here was not enough structure to the seminars and there was a tendency to rely too much on unprepared class discussion to carry them.”<sup>37</sup> Stockdale and Brennan worked to improve the seminar discussions for the second offering.

Both Stockdale and Brennan were passionate about the Foundations elective because it filled a void in the students’ professional development. This passion was evident to the students, faculty, and staff at the Naval War College and throughout the Navy. Unfortunately, Stockdale retired from the U.S. Navy and left the College shortly after AY 1978–79 to accept a position as president of The Citadel. However, his interest in and influence on the Foundations course continued long after he retired. Likewise, the bond of friendship that Stockdale had forged with Brennan continued to grow and prosper over the years.

## The Brennan Years

After Stockdale’s retirement, Brennan decided to remain at the College and continued to teach the Foundations elective himself as a part-time employee for the next thirteen years. Brennan did not change the course significantly during those years. However, he limited the course to twenty-five students to make it more manageable for only one instructor. Brennan continued to offer the course for two trimesters each academic year.<sup>38</sup>

Brennan developed and taught another elective, “Philosophy in American Values.” This course was popular at the College and allowed Brennan to dig deeper into American philosophy and literature. He also served as an academic adviser to international students at the Naval Command College. Although still a part-time employee, Brennan carried what many today would consider a full load.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout this time, Brennan's friendship with Stockdale and his family continued to blossom and grow. In a letter to Stockdale dated September 13, 1979, Brennan wrote as follows:

Yes, Foundations of Moral Obligation did meet for the first time yesterday, but it was a little like putting on *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. Still, the class is delighted to know that you will come to deliver the valedictory lecture at the 10th session. . . . This academic year will show, I think, whether EL 101 (Foundations of Moral Obligation) has what-it-takes to stand on its own feet. I think it can and should, but the comparatively large audience for the course's first trimester is still a result of your personal contribution and fame.<sup>40</sup>

In a subsequent letter dated November 6, 1979, Brennan wrote, "Mid-term is past, course papers are being busily written, and so far all seems to have gone very well, though I do miss you. I've had to do a lot more restructuring [of] the course than I had thought. Not that the content or the reading has changed—no, just the way of doing the course without you."<sup>41</sup>

Stockdale contemplated introducing the Foundations course to students at The Citadel.<sup>42</sup> He continued to rely on Brennan's feedback and advice in his outside presentations and articles. But he also provided input to his successors as NWC President about Brennan's success with the elective at the College. In a letter to Brennan dated March 19, 1982, Stockdale wrote, "Before I forget it, please let me know what you hear about the identity of Ed Welch's successor. I'll get on the phone with him right away and make a plea to keep the Philosophy Department (i.e., You). All I need is his name."<sup>43</sup>

Stockdale subsequently wrote to Rear Admiral James E. Service, Commander, Carrier Group Two, the incoming College President, on August 5, 1982:

I'm always afraid that NWC will be put under pressure to rid itself of all *apparently* quasi-military courses such as the Foundations of Moral Obligation which I founded with my good friend Dr. Joe Brennan.

I have no idea that you would even consider discontinuing it, but just as a *precaution*, let me give you my impressions of how it has gone under Joe Brennan alone since I left. I speak to his classes nearly every year. (He has added an American Values course which also draws a lot of subscribers in the spring trimester). As the classes filed out of their joint session to hear me this spring, officer after officer—particularly Marines—said "Best course, Best teacher in the place." I think a review of the class critiques will verify this. Joe rings the bell.<sup>44</sup> [emphasis original]

Stockdale also spoke to Rear Admiral Joseph C. Strasser, a later President of the College, about Brennan and the Foundations elective. In a letter to Brennan of January 10, 1992, Stockdale wrote:

Then at my request he buzzed the Admiral, and I told Joe [Strasser] how proud I was to be a part of your project. We shared stories about the number of Marine and Naval

officers we've each run into, who, on mention of the Naval War College, immediately mention "Joe Brennan's courses." As I count it, you are now in your 14th year there, and some of our 42 year old students in '78–79 are now 56! Some retired Admirals and Generals telling young grandchildren about their career highlights. . . . Admiral Strasser is a great fan of yours.<sup>45</sup>

Upon his retirement in 1992, Brennan received many accolades, including designation by the Secretary of the Navy as professor emeritus of philosophy.<sup>46</sup> His book *Foundations of Moral Obligation: The Stockdale Course* was published in 1992, shortly before he retired.

Brennan died in 2004, but his legacy is well established at the Naval War College. He helped to develop the Foundations elective and continued the course for thirteen years after Vice Admiral Stockdale retired. However, his legacy consists of much more than that. Brennan touched the hearts and minds of hundreds of NWC graduates and inspired them to look at things in a different light and to consider alternate paths to achieve their own *eudaimonia*.<sup>47</sup>

At Dr. Brennan's retirement ceremony, Stockdale said, "From the classics, throughout 14 years of teaching here, you have conducted what I consider to be the world's best course in military leadership. Never after taking your course will anyone be comfortable in believing that the analytic and reasoned approach is the 'be all and end all' of officership."<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps that is the essence of the Naval War College education.

## The Regan Years

Paul Regan began teaching the Foundations of Moral Obligation elective in the fall trimester of AY 1994–95 while on active duty as a USCG captain assigned to the College as the USCG adviser. There was a two-year gap in the course between Brennan's retirement and Regan taking over.

Originally, Regan was recruited, with two other faculty members, to teach the Foundations elective to end the temporary discontinuation of the course. Regan had a background in philosophy and volunteered to assist. When both the other faculty members fell out, Regan agreed to teach the elective alone. Even after his retirement from active duty in 1995, he continued to teach the elective one trimester every academic year for the next fifteen years. He worked for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in Boston and drove to Newport one afternoon each week to teach.<sup>49</sup>

Regan was also responsible for keeping the Stockdale name associated with the elective. Regan wrote, "About halfway through my time with the course I began to realize that many of the students no longer associated the course with him [Stockdale], so I requested the name change to include 'The Stockdale Course.' Enrollment figures immediately jumped up."<sup>50</sup>

Regan did not change the course significantly when he started teaching. In a statement dated June 6, 2016, Regan confessed, "I made a conscious decision to stick with the basic outline that Stockdale initiated and Prof Brennan continued. Since my degree is in

scholastic philosophy, which is heavily based in classic philosophy, I saw—and continue to see—the value of reading the actual works of the great philosophers. Quite honestly, from my background in philosophy, were I to design the course from scratch I would have used much the same approach as Stockdale and Professor Brennan.”<sup>51</sup> However, when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 and the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the original lesson on Lenin and Soviet philosophy became outdated and was removed.

Regan continued to use Brennan’s book *Foundations of Moral Obligation* as a major course text. The major change he instituted was to establish two different paths, a reading path and a writing path. Students in the reading path completed all assigned readings and the final examination; students in the writing path completed only the major readings and Professor Brennan’s book, and were required to write a ten-to-twelve-page paper on a topic dealing with ethics or moral judgment.<sup>52</sup> Regan explained, “After a while it was clear that the workload for this course was substantially greater than that of most other electives. Indeed, even after a degree in philosophy and years teaching, I could read most of the material at about 6 pages an hour. I attempted to level out the course by letting the students choose to express their thoughts in a longer paper (the standard elective length) or devote their time to the reading.”<sup>53</sup>

Although he only taught the course for one trimester each academic year, Paul Regan’s legacy is that he kept the elective vibrant and exciting for the students. He taught the course alone longer than Brennan had. His seminars were popular and full of lively discussions. Regan admitted, “Having lived real lives, students were not afraid to (courteously) say, ‘Captain, you’re full of crap’ . . . which [led] to debate and, hopefully, the opening of minds.”<sup>54</sup> Regan summarized it best as follows: “And finally, I think every good teacher realizes he or she learns as much as the students. Teaching the Stockdale Course was a privilege for me. I mentioned that in the last few years I taught by taking leave from FEMA every Wednesday and got no reimbursement—but really would have paid to teach for all I learned and all the fine and dedicated students I had over the years. . . . It was an honor and has become part of who I am.”<sup>55</sup> Regan left the College after AY 2009–10.<sup>56</sup>

## The Cook Years

Dr. Martin Cook came to the Naval War College in 2009 as the Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale Professor of Professional Military Ethics. He cotaught the Foundations elective with Dr. Tom Gibbons. Cook came from the U.S. Air Force Academy but also had taught at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, for several years. His record of publication and teaching professional military ethics was unsurpassed, and he integrated quickly into the College’s leadership and ethics team.

Dr. Cook knew little about the Foundations of Moral Obligation elective before he arrived but quickly realized its value for active-duty military officers. Accordingly, he made the decision to offer the elective during all three trimesters of the academic year. Cook also modified the curriculum to reflect contemporary issues affecting the military today. He added lessons on non-Western religion, including reading the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, and a lesson entitled “Finding Meaning in One’s Life,” reading Leo Tolstoy’s short story *The Death of Ivan Ilych* and Elie Wiesel’s novel *Night*. Cook introduced Jostein Gaarder’s

novel *Sophie's World*, an easy-to-read history of philosophy, to help students gain a better understanding of the different philosophers they studied.<sup>57</sup> Karl Marlantes's book *What It Is like to Go to War* is one of the best accounts of modern combat ever written, and became popular with students and faculty alike. Cook sponsored Marlantes as a guest speaker at the College every year.

Cook's syllabus included the following:

- Week One    Greek and Roman Stoics. Epictetus. Stockdale's *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*.
- Week Two    The Greek Tradition. Socrates/Plato. "Euthyphro," "Apology," and "Crito."
- Week Three   Plato. The Republic.
- Week Four    The Greek Tradition. Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- Week Five    The Western Religious Tradition.
- Week Six     The Enlightenment. Immanuel Kant.
- Week Seven   Life in Society. UN Charter, Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, and Kant's "Perpetual Peace."
- Week Eight   Finding Meaning in One's Life. Tolstoy and Wiesel.
- Week Nine    Non-Western (Hindu) Perspective. The Bhagavad Gita. Early Christian "Just War," and Karl Marlantes's *What It Is like to Go to War*.
- Week Ten     Some Skeptical Challenges. Dostoyevsky's "The Grand Inquisitor," Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and the Book of Job.

Cook established at the Naval War College the "Great Books" method taught at his alma mater, the University of Chicago, and at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, and Santa Fe, New Mexico. The students read original-source great books and then discussed the readings in seminar, with the faculty members facilitating the discussion. In other words, the seminar discussion was the primary focus, not the faculty members' lecturing from the front of the classroom. Cook and Gibbons sat at different ends of the classroom to facilitate and moderate the student discussions. Students learned just as much from each other and from the readings as they did from the faculty moderators. Cook commented, "I personally believe that the modified great books method makes the students engage far better than a lecture-discussion course would."<sup>58</sup>

Cook also relied heavily on technology; he instituted use of the Blackboard learning management system. The electronic syllabus he built within Blackboard actually came alive on screen with links to podcasts, embedded videos, and contemporary lectures on relevant topics. From the readings each week, every student wrote a one- or two-page posting of thoughts, criticisms, comments, and points to be explored. Students also were required to read and comment on each other's postings. This system had several advantages. First, students started the weekly discussions before they even arrived at the classroom, by commenting on each other's postings. Additionally, students improved their writing skills through the weekly postings and immediate feedback, rather than

writing a ten-to-twelve-page paper at the end of the course. Blackboard enabled Cook and Gibbons to jump-start the seminar discussion before they actually came to class.

Cook departed the Naval War College in 2016 to work at the U.S. Air Force Academy as a distinguished visiting professor. His fame and reputation as a leading scholar in professional military ethics had enhanced the Foundations elective and helped to establish it as one of the most popular electives during his tenure. His legacy of using technology, along with the Great Books method, improved the delivery of the course and brought it into the twenty-first century.

## Staying Power

Why has the Foundations of Moral Obligation elective continued to be so popular after nearly forty years? This simple yet thought-provoking question has many answers. The easy one is that the course owes its success to a triad of the faculty, the syllabus and readings, and the students. But there is much more to answering the question than that.

The faculty members who taught the elective over the years were all qualified and competent in their discipline. Moreover, they were all gifted and talented educators. Even more than that, they were passionate about the curriculum and brought that energy and passion to the classroom. Each in his own way set the conditions that enabled the students to think about the material, apply it to their lives, and then share those experiences with others in seminar. Regan revealed, “Most tellingly, in the class students would often bare their souls and bring to light moral dilemmas they had to deal with—and most implicitly trust their classmates not to let their statements be repeated.”<sup>59</sup> Rather than simply spouting information about ancient philosophers or literature in the seminar, the instructors empowered their students to apply what they learned to their daily lives and share this with their classmates.

The syllabus and course readings that Stockdale and Brennan originally selected almost forty years ago have remained fairly consistent across time. Of the ten lessons in the original syllabus, six are relatively similar today. In an after-action report dated January 29, 1980, Brennan wrote, “[T]he course should center on, though not be restricted to, important classical and modern readings in philosophy and the humanities. Moreover, whenever possible the readings should consist of primary, not secondary, sources.”<sup>60</sup> This guidance has stood the test of time and still is reflected in the syllabus. In 1982, Stockdale noted that “[w]e studied moral philosophy by looking at models of human beings under pressure, their portraits drawn from the best materials we could find in philosophy and literature. The professional implication for military men and women followed. We did not have to draw diagrams: the military applications came up naturally in seminar discussions.”<sup>61</sup>

Many of the readings are time-consuming and difficult to understand the first time through. Students often ask themselves, “Now, what did I just read?” However, the lessons and pearls of wisdom in the readings are priceless. Cook wrote, “I guess I was pleasantly surprised how many students seemed to make serious and genuine efforts to read and understand the material, even if they really didn’t get it until class.”<sup>62</sup> In the seminar

it is easy to see when the light goes on and a student suddenly “gets it” and really understands the text. This enables the learners to apply a text to their own lives and share it with others. One important metric of success is that, no matter how uncertain they were whether they had understood the week’s assigned reading when they arrived in class, during subsequent lessons most students would refer back unfailingly and accurately to previous readings.

Although they are difficult for many, the course readings are timeless and tend to make a lasting impression on students. In fact, many times on the last day of class the instructors provided supplementary reading lists for students to continue their studies in military ethics long after graduation. One student wrote, “I believe that I am better prepared after taking the Stockdale Course. Dr. Regan has given us a pretty impressive reading list to follow up our studies in this course. I’m making it a mission in my life to try and read all these classic works. If anything, this course has provoked a hunger in me to learn more about ethics and moral behavior. It must surely be a positive thing in a man’s life if he at least yearns to learn more about living a proper existence.”<sup>63</sup>

For some, the readings opened new doors and exposed them to material they never would have selected on their own. In a letter to Brennan a student wrote, “The readings introduced me to material that I should have read a long time ago, and never had either the inclination or the opportunity.”<sup>64</sup> Stockdale wanted students to read and discuss the classics. He trusted that doing so would help them to develop a moral compass and enable them to think critically. Brennan later wrote, “Training in the humanities, Stockdale believed, would show that much of what goes by the name ‘social science’ serves up ideas expressed earlier and better in classical philosophy and modern literature.”<sup>65</sup> This course provided an opportunity for many Naval War College graduates to read and discuss classic literature, which shaped their personal and professional development and had a positive impact on their lives.

The students are the third critical element in the triad of success. For the most part, the students at the Naval War College are motivated, want to learn, and work hard. In other words, they are avid consumers of the educational experience. Many have recent combat experience and are willing to share those experiences with classmates. They bring a willingness to learn and an insatiable desire to question things that others often take for granted. Why do the students like the Foundations elective? Regan’s analysis is as follows:

Almost any military career path is technical in one way or another. Rarely is there the opportunity to answer the real questions: What makes life worth living? For the military, what is worth dying for? How should I raise my children? These fundamental questions require a certain maturity to address. The students at the NWC have reached an age where these questions are important, as are the answers. There are few times in life when one has the opportunity to look in depth at such questions.<sup>66</sup>

The Foundations elective provides an opportunity for students to ask these “hard questions” in a nonthreatening environment among peers who are asking the same things. Cook opined, “I think it’s popular because I think Aristotle’s observations about

the study of ethics (that it's not useful to do it with the young, who lack experience) is borne out by the fact that after a couple of decades of adult experience they seem so eager to think about these matters."<sup>67</sup> There is a difference between studying philosophy as an undergraduate and as a graduate student: the graduate student can relate more to the lessons because of his or her greater life experiences.

Countless letters express students' gratitude to the College for offering the Foundations elective. A USN officer and future President of the Naval War College wrote to Stockdale, "Some students questioned the course's relevance, if you can believe it. For me it would be like questioning the relevance of oxygen. . . . I find the subjects of the course extremely useful. Thanks for the effort—it is still bearing fruit 20+ years later."<sup>68</sup> Another student wrote, "It's a dangerous and deadly working environment we have *chosen* to work in. Without this foundation (pun intended) in moral and ethical behavior, when we do get in the buzzsaw, can we really be sure we'll be prepared?" (emphasis original).<sup>69</sup>

Students continue to rate the course high on their end-of-course evaluations. Recent students' comments reflect this sentiment.

"Amazing course to only add to my tool box in becoming a better effective leader and thinker."

"Reading and understanding certain philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Thomas Aquinas, Kierkegaard, etc. can be difficult. This course definitely challenged my ability to read and interpret their works. Also, the course work challenged my thinking and long-held beliefs, which was great."

"Foundations of Moral Obligation is one of those courses that changes one's perspectives and the lenses that we perceive events in life—both of which is [*sic*] important in an increasing multi-national world."

"Had me think about why I did certain things or why I should do things differently."

"Excellent course. Needed for anyone who considers themselves a future senior leader."

"The best course that I have taken."<sup>70</sup>

It is not just one or two things that have made the Foundations elective popular for almost forty years. It is a combination of many that contributed to making possible those magical moments in seminar when students are able to discuss controversial issues and then open their minds to a different way of thinking.

Naval War College graduates have liked the Foundations of Moral Obligation elective so well that some have proposed making it part of the core curriculum, to be taken by all students. This aspect is especially relevant given the recent spike of events questioning the moral compass of senior USN leaders.

However, it would be a mistake to require all students at the College to take Foundations of Moral Obligation. Part of the value of the course comes from the well-qualified and passionate instructors who have taught the elective in the past. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to educate enough faculty members to offer the course to all students

at the same level of proficiency. Nor would the quality of student participation be as high if the course was a mandatory requirement. Those students who choose to take the course do so out of a desire to discover new ways to think about life's fundamental questions.

Vice Admiral Stockdale understood the importance of a liberal arts education and the study of the humanities in a highly technical defense organization. "The philosophy course he took at Stanford in his thirties, said Stockdale, did him a lot more good in Hanoi than any of the Naval Academy's technical subjects."<sup>71</sup> Stockdale also realized that leaders need to develop more than just their technical proficiency. As Brennan noted in 1983, "The study of good philosophy and literature, he [Stockdale] held, would benefit human beings; and, since military officers were human, it would be good for them, too, not only as human beings but as military officers."<sup>72</sup>

Stockdale recognized the importance of military officers becoming lifelong learners. Officers should never stop learning and questioning. Brennan related that "[w]hat the officers liked best about the Stockdale course was the opportunity to reflect on questions they felt had always been in their own minds, but just below the surface. This course, they agreed, provided them with the chance to raise those questions to the level of mature consciousness."<sup>73</sup>

The continuing relevance and popularity of the course only serve to reinforce Stockdale's original reason for establishing it: to develop a course for military officers, focusing on leadership and ethics, that gives them the moral tools for success, whether on the battlefield or in a staff job at the Pentagon. A reporter from the *Washington Post* summarized it best when he wrote as follows:

Called "Foundations of Moral Obligation," the course that Stockdale himself will teach represents the latest attempt to help American fighting men cope with pressure, including but not limited to that inflicted by captivity.

He will try to convey to young officers what teachings got him through his 7½ years of captivity, which began on Sept. 9, 1965, when he parachuted from his damaged A-4 fighter-bomber into a tree. He will try to explain how and why a man can summon up astonishing courage if he has committed himself to integrity—"one of those words which many people keep in that desk drawer labeled 'too hard,'" in Stockdale's words.<sup>74</sup>

Over 1,900 graduates and family members have taken the Foundations of Moral Obligation course since Vice Admiral Stockdale and Dr. Brennan introduced it in 1978. Little did the two men know at the time how this one course would impact the lives of so many over the years.

## NOTES

1. Jonathan W. Greenert [Adm., USN], *The Navy Leader Development Strategy*, January 2013, p. 1, available at [www.usnwc.edu/](http://www.usnwc.edu/).
2. Jonathan W. Greenert [Adm., USN], "Navy Leader Development Update," e-mail, January 29, 2014.

3. Naval War College, *Academic Catalog AY 2016–17* (Newport, RI: Naval Leadership and Ethics Center, 2016), available at [www.usnwc.edu/](http://www.usnwc.edu/).
4. In addition to Stockdale, Brennan, Regan, and Cook, Dr. Thomas B. Grassey taught the Foundations of Moral Obligation elective for one trimester during AY 2007–2008, and Dr. Timothy J. Demy cotaught the elective with the author for one trimester during AY 2008–2009.
5. “This Professor Learned the Hard Way,” *Time*, February 19, 1979, p. 98.
6. James B. Stockdale to Joseph Brennan, December 5, 1977, James B. Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 1, Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport, RI [hereafter Stockdale Papers].
7. Martin L. Cook, “Reflections on the Stockdale Legacy,” *Naval War College Review* 65, no. 3 (Summer 2012), p. 8.
8. James B. Stockdale to Joseph Brennan, November 24, 1975, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 1.
9. Epictetus was a famous Stoic philosopher who lived from AD 55 to 135.
10. Stockdale to Brennan, November 24, 1975.
11. Paul Regan to author, June 6, 2016.
12. Stockdale to Brennan, November 24, 1975.
13. Jim Stockdale, *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1995), p. 20.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
15. Jim and Sybil Stockdale, *In Love and War: The Story of a Family's Ordeal and Sacrifice during the Vietnam Years* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), pp. 444–45.
16. Joseph Gerard Brennan, *Foundations of Moral Obligation* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1994), p. xv.
17. Stockdale to Brennan, December 5, 1977.
18. Joseph G. Brennan to Erik, January 21, 1978, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 3.
19. Joseph G. Brennan, NWC journal notes, n.d., Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 3.
20. James B. Stockdale to Joseph Brennan, January 13, 1978, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 2.
21. “This Professor Learned the Hard Way,” p. 98.
22. Brennan, *Foundations of Moral Obligation*, p. xxi.
23. Joseph G. Brennan, “The Stockdale Course,” in *Teaching Values and Ethics in College*, ed. Michael J. Collins (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983), p. 75.
24. Brennan to Erik, January 21, 1978.
25. Joseph G. Brennan to Loren, February 5, 1978, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 3.
26. Joseph G. Brennan, “Report on Elective 101, ‘Foundations of Moral Obligation,’” January 29, 1980, p. 2, Stockdale Papers, box 7, folder 1.
27. “This Professor Learned the Hard Way,” p. 98.
28. James B. Stockdale, “On the Occasion of Rhode Island Independence” (public address, Trinity Church, Newport, RI, May 7, 1978), Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 4.
29. James F. Giblin Jr. [Capt., USN (Ret.)], e-mail to author, June 12, 2016. Giblin became NWC provost after his retirement from active duty.
30. Brennan, *Foundations of Moral Obligation*, p. xxii.
31. Brennan, “Report on Elective 101,” p. 3; Brennan, “The Stockdale Course,” p. 77.
32. Brennan, “Report on Elective 101,” p. 2.
33. Brennan, “The Stockdale Course,” p. 76.
34. Brennan, “Report on Elective 101,” p. 3.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
36. *Ibid.*, app. F2.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
39. Joseph G. Brennan to Capt. Marvin Rice, USN, July 2, 1990, Joseph G. Brennan Papers, box 2, folder 17, Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport, RI [hereafter Brennan Papers].
40. Joseph G. Brennan to Vice Adm. James B. Stockdale, USN, September 13, 1979, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 4.
41. Joseph G. Brennan to Vice Adm. James B. Stockdale, USN, November 6, 1979, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 4.
42. *Ibid.*

43. James B. Stockdale to Joseph Brennan, March 19, 1982, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 7.
44. James B. Stockdale to Rear Adm. James Service, August 5, 1982, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 7.
45. James B. Stockdale to Joseph Brennan, January 10, 1992, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 7.
46. Joseph C. Strasser to Prof. Brennan, July 22, 1992, Brennan Papers, box 2, folder 3.
47. *Eudaimonia* is a Greek word commonly translated as “happiness” or “welfare”; however, “human flourishing” has been proposed as a more accurate translation.
48. James B. Stockdale to Joseph Brennan [letter to be read at his retirement ceremony], July 22, 1992, p. 3, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 17.
49. Regan to author, June 6, 2016, p. 1.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
52. Prof. Paul Regan, “Syllabus, Elective Course WE 592, 1996–1997, Foundations of Moral Obligation,” p. 6.
53. Regan to author, June 6, 2016, pp. 2–3.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
56. However, Captain Regan’s son, Cdr. Sean Regan, USCG, took the course a few years later with Drs. Cook and Gibbons.
57. Dr. Martin L. Cook and Dr. Tom Gibbons, “Syllabus, EL-592, Foundations of Moral Obligation (The ‘Stockdale Course’).”
58. Martin L. Cook to author, June 22, 2016.
59. Regan to author, June 6, 2016, p. 4.
60. Brennan, “Report on Elective 101,” p. 2.
61. Brennan, “The Stockdale Course,” p. 76.
62. Cook to author, June 22, 2016.
63. P. D. Marghella to Vice Adm. James B. Stockdale, USN (Ret.), February 23, 1998, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 18.
64. W. Strong to Dr. Joseph G. Brennan, November 1, 1984, Brennan Papers, box 2, folder 20.
65. Brennan, “The Stockdale Course,” p. 75.
66. Regan to author, June 6, 2016, p. 4.
67. Cook to author, June 22, 2016.
68. P. Wisecup to Admiral and Mrs. Stockdale, February 22, 1998, Stockdale Papers, box 6, folder 18.
69. Marghella to Stockdale, February 23, 1998.
70. Student comments from electives survey, SE592, Foundations of Moral Obligation, Spring 2016.
71. G. R. Wilson, “A Navy Man’s Code of Honor,” *Boston Globe*, April 30, 1978, p. A3.
72. Brennan, “The Stockdale Course,” p. 75.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
74. Wilson, “A Navy Man’s Code of Honor,” p. A3.

## APPENDIX E

### **Memo to Foundations of Moral Obligation Students, 15 August 1978**

This is Stockdale's note to the Naval War College students who registered to take the initial offering of the elective Foundations of Moral Obligation. Stockdale provides an overview of the course and student requirements. He writes, "Remember, throughout the course, you are studying philosophy, not political science."



**Source:** U.S. Naval War College photo / NWC Archives

*Tues 15 August*  
**1978**

A WORD TO THOSE WHO SIGNED UP FOR --  
FOUNDATIONS OF MORAL OBLIGATION


This will be a course in moral philosophy during which, in ten short weeks, we will swiftly touch the bases of the concepts of virtue (and villainy) of the best thinkers the Western world has produced -- starting with the ancient Jew who wrote the Book of Job, and ending with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. A sprint through the Old Testament, the writings of the ancient Greeks, and the Rules of Conduct of the stoics completes the first leg, the first act of a three act drama.

After a one week break, we start modern philosophy with Immanuel Kant and his mirror image, John Stewart Mill. The sharp contrast between the way they would judge the good or evil of a moral decision is typical of the whole course -- for a study of ethics is not a stroll through a garden of sweetness and light but rather a tour of an Olympic stadium in which are marked, at all points of the compass, the inevitable and diverse conclusions of the ultimate logical extensions of different wise men's basic assumptions of the nature of man and the nature of the universe. This second act of our drama is climaxed by a pitched battle between the spokesmen of individualism (Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nietzsche, and the J. P. Sartre of World War II days) and the spokesmen of collectivism (Marx, Engels, V. I. Lenin).

After another break, Act III -- a short one -- begins with science and values (does the universe have meaning or purpose?), and ends with a return to the beginning -- Epictetus, the stoic ideal, and the ethics of the military man -- philosophy as a technical analysis and way of life.

Emphasis throughout is on the military themes of reliability, courage, endurance and duty. As preparation for the first lecture (September 13th), I recommend you read my article "The World of Epictetus", plus a contrary view by Professor Walzer called "Prisoners of War". Additionally, please read Arthur Koestler's Darkness At Noon in its entirety. Although the latter book is 40 years old, it is not old fashioned. N. S. Rubashov is facing the problems of today and tomorrow, and many of the ethical dilemmas which form the basis of this course are framed by him. For instance, the contrast in viewpoints between Kant and Mill is embodied and illuminated in his diary entry (pp. 78-81).

Remember, throughout the course, you are studying philosophy, not political science. Darkness is about communism, which may not be timeless, but its message is about collectivist ethics, which is. Don't waste your time memorizing dates and names, but concentrate on concepts. For instance, is conscience a "metaphysical brothel" or a "grammatical fiction"? (See pp. 124-128.) Or is it something else?

  
J. B. STOCKDALE  
Vice Admiral, U. S. Navy

I'll see you  
Sept 13th.



# **APPENDIX F**

## **Foundations of Moral Obligation Syllabus, Academic Year 1978–79**

This is a copy of the first syllabus, used by Admiral Stockdale and Professor Joe Brennan when they originally taught the course. The syllabus has remained much the same throughout the years to the present.

# THE UNITED STATES NAVAL WAR COLLEGE



ELECTIVE COURSE 101

SYLLABUS

FOUNDATIONS OF MORAL OBLIGATION

Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale, USN  
Professor Joseph G. Brennan

COURSE DESCRIPTIONEL 101 - FOUNDATIONS OF MORAL OBLIGATION

Since Socrates, moral philosophy has been taught both as a technical discipline and as a guide to life. Basic ideas to be discussed in this course include right, good, honor, duty, freedom, necessity, law, justice, happiness, insofar as these pertain to the human situation generally and to the military method in particular. Lecture topics, discussions and readings will be drawn from both classical and modern sources, including the Old Testament, the Socratic Dialogues of Plato, the ethical writings of Aristotle, Kant, Mill, and Sartre. There will be supplemental readings in Emerson, Thoreau, Dostoyevsky, Conrad, Koestler, and Solzhenitsyn.

STUDENT REQUIREMENTSReadings: Required and Recommended

Required readings are listed below by week. Recommended readings will be on Library reserve, but are not required reading. Unit notes for most weeks' topics will be distributed in advance of the particular week and are to be considered required readings.

Novels and stories on the required reading list lend themselves easily to reading in advance of the beginning of the course. Attention to these readings in advance, if convenient, is suggested so that a greater amount of time may be made available for the more technical readings.

READING ASSIGNMENTSWEEK ONE - From 20th Century Technology to the World of Epictetus. The Meaning of Moral Philosophy.

- Required: Stockdale, J.B., "The World of Epictetus," Atlantic Monthly, April, 1978.
- Koestler, A., Darkness at Noon. (A novel)
- Walzer, M., "Prisoners of War." Obligations.
- Recommended: Wright, Ross W., "These Were Some of the Happiest Days of My Life," Rhode Islander, 27 Nov. 1977.

WEEK TWO - The Book of Job. Life is not Fair. The Problem of Evil.

- Required: Job, "The Book of Job," Old Testament
- Solzhenitsyn, A., One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch.
- Recommended: Camus, A., The Myth of Sisyphus; The Plague. (A novel)

WEEK THREE - Socrates: Doctrine and Example. Civil Obedience and Disobedience. Can Virtue Be Taught?

- Required: Plato, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito; Phaedo.
- Recommended: Plato, Meno in DIALOGUES OF PLATO
- Thoreau, H., Civil Disobedience.

WEEK FOUR - Happiness as Living Well and Faring Well. Aristotle on the Moral and Intellectual Virtues. Courage as Balance and Endurance.

- Required: Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics. (Selections)
- Crane, S., "The Open Boat." (Story)
- Conrad, J., Typhoon. (Short novel)
- Recommended: Plato, Laches, in DIALOGUES OF PLATO.

WEEK FIVE - Ethics of Duty and Conscience. Internal and External Law. Ethic Meaning of "Ought" and "Right."

Required: Kant, I., Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, pp. 9-59.

Hart, H.L.A., The Concept of Law. Chapters 8 and 9.

WEEK SIX - Morality as Social Utility. Justice and the Greatest Happiness Principles.

Required: Mill, J.S., Utilitarianism.

Recommended: Mill, J.S., On Liberty.

Rawls, J., "Justice as Fairness."

Rawls, J., A Theory of Justice.

Kristol, I. "On Equality."

WEEK SEVEN - Individualism and the Collective - I.

Required: Emerson, R.W., "Self-Reliance" in Emerson, Essays.

Sartre, J-P, "Existentialism Is a Humanism" in Kaufmann, W., ed., Existentialism From Dostoyevsky to Sartre.

Dostoyevsky, F., "Notes from the Underground" in Kaufmann, Existentialism.

WEEK EIGHT - Individualism and the Collective - II.

Required: Marx-Engels, The Communist Manifesto.

Lenin, V.I., What Is to be Done? in R.C. Tucker, ed., The Lenin Anthology.

Dostoyevsky, F., "The Grand Inquisitor" from The Brothers Karamazov

Recommended: DeGeorge, R., Soviet Ethics.

WEEK NINE - Science and Values. Does the Universe Have Meaning or Purpose?

Required: Monod, J., Chance and Necessity, Chapters 1, 2, 7, 8, 9.

Sinsheimer, R.J., "The Presumptions of Science," DAEDALUS, Spring 1978.

Recommended: Watson, J., The Double Helix.

Kuhn, T., The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.

WEEK TEN - Return to the Beginning. Epictetus. The Stoic Ideal and the Ethics of the Military Man. Philosophy as Technical Analysis and Way of Life. The Socratic Example.

Required: Epictetus, Enchiridion.

Malcolm, N., Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir.

Plato, Phaedo (opening and death scene).

Stockdale, J.B., Selections.

Recommended: Gray, G., The Warriors.

TITLE: EL 101 Foundations of Moral Obligation, VADM J. B. Stockdale

ELECTIVE DESCRIPTION: Since Socrates, moral philosophy has been taught both as a technical discipline and as a guide to life. Basic ideas to be discussed in this course include right, good, honor, duty, freedom, necessity, law, justice, happiness, insofar as these pertain to the human situation generally and to the military ethos in particular. Lecture topics, discussions and readings will be drawn from both classical and modern sources. The tentative reading list includes the following required or recommended selections:

<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>TITLE</u>
Aristotle	<u>Nichomachean Ethics</u> (selections)
*Camus, A.	<u>The Plague</u> , <u>The Myth of Sisyphus</u>
Conrad, J.	"Typhoon"
Crane, S.	"The Open Boat"
Dostoyevsky, F.	"The Grand Inquisitor" from <u>The Brothers Karamazov</u>
	"Notes From the Underground"
*Durant, W. & A.	<u>Lessons of History</u>
Emerson, R. W.	"Self-Reliance" in <u>Essays and English Traits</u>
Epictetus	<u>Enchiridion</u>
*Gray, G.	<u>The Warriors</u>
Hart, H. L. A.	<u>The Concept of Law</u>
Job	<u>Book of Job</u> (Old Testament)
Lenin, V. I.	"What is to be Done?"
Kant, I.	<u>Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals</u> (selections)
Koestler, A.	<u>Darkness at Noon</u>
*Maccoby, M.	<u>The Gamesman</u>
Malcolm, N.	<u>Ludwig Wittgenstein: a Memoir</u>
Marx, K.	"Communist Manifesto"
Mill, J. S.	<u>Utilitarianism</u> , <u>On Liberty</u>
Monod, J.	<u>Chance and Necessity</u>
Plato	<u>Euthyphro</u> , <u>Crito</u> , <u>Apology</u> , <u>Phaedo</u>
*Rawls, J.	"Justice As Fairness", <u>Theory of Justice</u>
*Sagan, C.	<u>The Dragons of Eden</u>
Sartre, J-P	"Existentialism is a Humanism"
Sinsheimer, R. L.	"The Presumptions of Science"
Smith, H.	<u>Kamongo</u>
Solzhenitsyn, A.	<u>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch</u>
Stockdale, J. B.	<u>Selected Writings</u>
Walzer, M.	"Prisoners of War"
*Watson, J.	<u>The Double Helix</u>
*Wright, R. W.	"Those Were Some of the Happiest Days of My Life"

\* Optional

COURSE SUMMARY

JBS/JGB

Foundations of Moral Obligation

Naval War College

1978-79

Congressional committee hearing table. The readings of this session concern men in prison only because that environment is intense, extortion-prone and instructive. They include "The World of Epictetus" by VADM J.B. Stockdale, the course lecturer, Professor Michael Walzer's viewpoints on the obligations of a prisoner of war, and a fictional account as given in Koestler's novel *DARKNESS AT NOON*, the story of a man in prison, faced with death, forced to examine his past and to rethink his moral commitments.

#### SECOND WEEK

The existence of evil in the world has produced one of the oldest problems upon which humans have pondered. Religious and poetic expression of this enigma we find in *THE BOOK OF JOB* of The Old Testament. "JOB" is a work by an unknown author writing in an ancient era before philosophy had been developed as an intellectual and moral discipline.

The frame of Job's story is religious, the supreme meaning: the ways of God. How are His ways justified to men? Why do the good and the just suffer undeservedly? Job reasons with God and receives an answer in terms of the incommensurability of the finite and the infinite. God's ways are not our ways.

Modern parables are joined to our thoughts on the Book of Job. Albert Camus' novel *THE PLAGUE* tells the story of a man fighting a losing battle; he fights on knowing that his own efforts are unavailing. Solzhenitsyn's novel *ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVITCH* is the chronicle of a simple man, unjustly imprisoned in an arctic Soviet labor camp. He endures the cold and hardship with a shrug, gives his bleak day a little meaning and value by outwitting the system to the extent of an extra spoonful of soup, a second piece of bread.

#### THIRD WEEK

Socrates was the man who gave philosophy a decisive turn toward moral inquiry. Before this old Athenian, philosophy had been hardly more than primitive physics. As Plato dramatizes the thoughts and events of Socrates' life, we consider the questions of the just and the unjust man; the problem of duty to our country; whether moral values can be taught; should we obey or disobey an unjust law? Through Plato, we visit Socrates in prison during the final hours of his life and hear his last discourse to his students. That discourse sets out two themes, of metaphysical and moral implications that had profound impact on the West--the Platonic doctrine of the Forms, and the teaching of the separable and immortal soul.

## FOURTH WEEK

We then turn to the NICHOMACHEAN ETHICS of Aristotle, Plato's pupil, a work that stands as the first textbook of moral philosophy. To Aristotle, right actions are what we expect of a good man. Just what constitutes a good character must be considered before asking what actions are right or wrong. For right actions follow from a good character, and a good character is built up by practice of those virtues or excellences proper to a human. We read Aristotle on the moral virtues as means or balance between excess and defect. Courage--which Plato called Endurance of the Soul--is defined as the mean between excess of rashness and the defect of cowardice. Courage is the supreme virtue of the military man, for death is the most terrible of evils, and fearlessness in the face of death the highest moral excellence. Aristotle applies his criterion of the mean to the other virtues--generosity, self-control, self-respect, truthfulness.

The theme of endurance stands out in two stories of courage at sea that are read in conjunction with Aristotle on character and courage--Stephen Crane's story "The Open Boat" and Conrad's novel TYPHOON.

## FIFTH WEEK

We turn now to a crucial work in modern ethical theory, Kant's FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE ETHIC OF MORALS. Central to Kant's theory is the idea of duty, certainly a concept inseparable from the military vocation. Opposing every attempt to reduce moral judgment to expediency and profit, Kant emphasizes the absolute and unconditional character of the moral command we give ourselves. As autonomous beings, capable of being a law to ourselves, we can say "I ought to do this because it is right."--Not because it will profit me, make me feel better, be good for business, grease the wheels, serve some other purpose. Kant's Categorical Imperative provides the formula for the supreme command of duty--"Act so that you can will your act to become universal law." And to those who say "Kant's ethics is all very well in theory, but in practice it won't work," Kant replies that he is not describing how people DO act or what DOES work, but how people OUGHT to act and what SHOULD work.

## SIXTH WEEK

To Kant, the substance of morality lies in the quality of our motive, in the freedom of our intent from self-profit and narrow expediency. Hence he understresses the role of consequences or results in the moral situation. By contrast, John Stuart Mill's UTILITARIANISM endeavors to locate the nerve of morality in consequences rather than in motive. Those actions, he says, are morally right which tend to result in the increase of general happiness. Such acts, even though done from self-seeking motives, are still morally right acts--though we may not esteem very highly the moral worth of the person who does the right thing for hope of reward. In Mill's writing we see clear stress on what have become the traditional virtues of liberalism--fairness, impartiality, evenhanded justice, respect for just law, tolerance for all so long as they do not infringe on the rights of others.

Mill's essay "On Liberty", the twin of his treatise on utilitarianism, emphasizes the supreme value of the individual person in vocabulary different but in meaning not far from Kant's stress on the autonomy and inviolability of the individual person--his right to follow the law of his own nature. To Mill this may lead to the most radical nonconformity so long as it does not damage the liberty of others.

## SEVENTH WEEK

The theme of individual sovereignty finds American expression in Emerson's 19th century essay SELF RELIANCE and in our own time, post-World War II Europe, Sartre's EXISTENTIALISM. To the existentialist, what a man is rests with himself. We are not born with characters, but we make them by our acts. A man is the sum of his deeds, and the responsibility for them rests squarely on his own shoulders. What we are is up to us.

Anticipating Sartre, Dostoyevsky's NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND preaches an extreme form of individualism which denies the Socratic axiom that when we act we cannot help but choose what we think to be our good. The Underground Man asserts that men do not reason things out that way, that they will go knowingly, willingly, toward their own certain destruction. People will deliberately choose that which is harmful, forbidden, shattering. Here Dostoyevsky is reacting to a certain fashionable moral optimism of his time, based on the claim that the way to happiness is that of reasonable self-interest.

## EIGHTH WEEK

In contrast to the extreme ethical individualism of Existentialism stands the collectivist ideology of Marxism-Leninism, illustrated by Marx's COMMUNIST MANIFESTO and Lenin's WHAT IS TO BE DONE? The latter is a classic treatise in the techniques of securing a social and political end, judged by its author to be supremely good, by any means whatsoever. The end justifies the means, in the case of the supreme social and political good, for what else would justify the means in this case? As reflective commentary on these classics of Marxism-Leninism, we consider the confrontation of Christ and the Grand Inquisitor from Dostoyevsky's novel THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV--a parable not only of a Church run wild but of Communism in the same situation as well. In both, the dread figure of the Interrogator takes center stage. He has arrived from post-medieval Seville--or perhaps from 20th century Hanoi.

## NINTH WEEK

Marx and Lenin believed their social doctrine to be "scientific". But most contemporary scientists working in physics, chemistry, biology, and related natural sciences, consider this a misuse of the word "science." What then is the relation--if any--between science and ethical values? We are told that organisms depend to some degree on their "genetic programs" which are "pre-wired" into their nervous systems. Although humans rely to a much greater extent on their brains, what is the connection between behavior, including ethical behavior, and genetics? No study of moral philosophy would be complete today if it ignored the presence of science and its effects in our world, or overlooked the role of technology in our lives. Jacques Monod's CHANCE AND NECESSITY presents the case not for the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels (which Monod considers a form of sheer animism) but for scientific materialism--the doctrine that reality is constituted of physical, chemical, and biological elements only. Organic life, consciousness, mind, are to Monod more or less complicated states of purely physical entities in various states of combination or energy levels. Monod claims that science is value-free, that it deals with what is, not with what ought to be. For him, the only ethical commitment an enlightened person should make today is to the "objective" method of the natural sciences, a method which Monod believes constitutes the only path to truth. We examine critically the limitations of this ethical puritanism, noting particularly the failure of the author to recognize that the ethical value of knowledge itself is a doctrine as old as Aristotle, that Monod's own admirable work in helping unlock the secrets of organic life is morally as well as scientifically

important, that science has in itself moral potentialities--these residing in science's proven power to transform the worse to the better, to improve the human condition. The philosophy of the scientist in Homer Smith's story, KAMONGO, (written about 40 years earlier) is similar to that of Monod.

#### TENTH WEEK

The theme of science and technology leads us back to the beginning of the course where men in 90 seconds parachute from the world of 20th century technology into primitive conditions where nothing is "given" but one's own resources. In this situation, one is forced to fall back on the power of his will. A better guide to self-sufficiency and moral resource is found in the writings of the Ancient Stoic Epictetus than in any strategic, managerial or operational texts in Newport.

Marx's dialectical materialism posited a Godless universe, yet one with meaning. For to Marx, history and matter itself moved and developed according to laws that could be learned by men, used, and exploited for human advantage so that a social order deemed unjust could be overthrown and replaced by one thought just.

Monod's scientific materialism posits a Godless universe devoid of meaning. There is no Plan, no rationale, no design, no God, not even dialectical laws of matter. Like his friend Camus, Monod believes that the only meaning of life is the meaning we humans put into it. In Monod's case, this meaning is dedication to the objective methods of science. There is no meaning or value in the Universe as such.

Pagan Stoicism and the Christian religion constitute two responses to this, answers that overlap, for Stoicism was the philosophical forerunner of Christian doctrine. Stoicism was a materialism WITH GOD, a materialism in which the universe had meaning, rationale, purpose, BECAUSE that universe was part of God. God is not separate from the material universe, like spirit from dead matter. God is immanent in the universe; He is its inseparable cause. The Stoic's belief in the relation of our world to God was not far from Paul's "In Him, we live, and move, and have our being." By His divine mind or reason (Logos), God gives the universe--as soul gives to body--its life, its lawlike, orderly, rational character. From this metaphysical doctrine, the Stoic draws conclusions pertinent to personal ethics. Just as the universe--God's visible aspect--is sufficient unto itself, so our way should be that of self-reliance. We should endeavor to do what is in our power to control, to accept with equanimity whatever happens to us that we cannot control. We should try to learn the causes of things (not very different from Monod's "ethic of knowledge") and through this

knowledge develop the ethical virtue of understanding and compassion toward all things. We are one with Nature and with all that is comprehended in Nature. Thus the Stoic ethical ideal of scientific understanding, of knowing things through their causes, of accepting the reality of a shared common human nature, regardless of our condition--rich or poor, powerful or weak, sick or well--paved the way for Christianity. For two basic doctrines of Stoicism--the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man--were taken up into Christianity and made part of a world religion whose God takes account of the fall of a sparrow, as well as that of a kingdom.

Through the Manual (ENCHIRIDION) of the Stoic Epictetus we are reminded of the double role of philosophy as it developed in the West--philosophy as doctrine and philosophy as a life lived. Socrates lived what he taught, dedicated his life to his teaching--that was the one thing (and yet it was everything to him) that he held above the law. In the technical philosophy of our own time, this is matched by Wittgenstein whose philosophy of linguistic analysis seems remote from ordinary concerns; yet its technical character did not prevent him from giving the same absolute commitment to his profession that Socrates gave to his. Wittgenstein said that encounter with him should produce moral change; ethical values could not be talked about, they must be lived.

What are the limits, if any, of the moral as well as the professional commitment to duty that may be found in the military life. The ancient Greeks thought of moral virtue or excellence as that which could be expected of a man. What are the virtues or moral excellences that may justifiably be expected of a military officer? To what extent do these coincide with the professional excellence that may be expected? To what extent do they transcend or go beyond the latter?

In his introduction to our edition of Epictetus's ENCHIRIDION, Albert Salomon notes that the Roman Stoics coined the formula: *Vivere militare!* (Life is being a soldier) and says that the ENCHIRIDION is "a manual for the combat officer." The course ends with the question: to what extent is this still true today?

# **APPENDIX G**

## **Foundations of Moral Obligation Reading List, Academic Year 1978–79**

This is the reading list for the first offering of the Foundations of Moral Obligation course. Its list of primary sources shows the variety of works that Stockdale and Brennan considered necessary for the students to read. Many of the same readings continue to be assigned in the present-day course.

TITLE: EL 101 *Foundations of Moral Obligation*, VADM J. B. Stockdale

ELECTIVE DESCRIPTION: Since Socrates, moral philosophy has been taught both as a technical discipline and as a guide to life. He held that that which is just transcends self-interest, and this course follows his model, wrestling with that hierarchy of ideas germane to the heart of a warrior. Basic ideas to be discussed include right, good, honor, duty, freedom, necessity, law, justice, happiness, insofar as these pertain to the human situation generally and to the military ethos in particular. Lecture topics, discussions, and readings will be drawn from both classical and modern sources including the Book of Job, the Socratic dialogues of Plato, the ethical writings of Aristotle, Epictetus, Kant, Mill, and Sartre. Other readings include Emerson, Dostoyevsky, Conrad, Koestler, Monod, and Solzhenitsyn.

The reading list includes the following required and optional selections:

I. Required:

AUTHOR	TITLE
Aristotle	<i>Nichomachean Ethics</i> (selections) [sic]
Camus, A.	<i>The Plague</i>
Conrad, J.	<i>Typhoon</i>
Dostoyevsky, F.	"The Grand Inquisitor" from <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> "Notes From The Underground"
Emerson, R. W.	"Self-Reliance" in <i>Essays</i>
Epictetus	<i>Enchiridion</i>
Hart, H. L. A.	<i>The Concept of Law</i> (chapters 8 and 9)
Job	Book of Job ( <i>Old Testament</i> )
Kant, I.	<i>Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals</i> (selections)
Koestler, A.	<i>Darkness At Noon</i>
Lenin, V. I.	<i>What Is To Be Done?</i>
Marx, K.	<i>The Communist Manifesto</i>
Mill, J. S.	<i>Utilitarianism</i>
Monod, J.	<i>Chance and Necessity</i> (chapters 1, 2, 7, 8, 9)
Plato	<i>Euthyphro, Crito, Apology, Phaedo</i>
Sartre, J.-P.	"Existentialism is a Humanism"
Smith, Homer	<i>Kamongo</i>
Solzhenitsyn, A.	<i>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch</i> [sic]
Stockdale, J. B.	"The World of Epictetus," <i>Atlantic Monthly</i> , April 1978 Selected Writings
Walzer, M.	"Prisoners of War" (Essay)

## II. Optional:

AUTHOR	TITLE
Bok, S.	<i>Lying</i>
Camus, A.	<i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>
Crane, S.	"The Open Boat" (Story)
DeGeorge, R.	<i>Soviet Ethics</i>
Durant, W. & A.	<i>Lessons of History</i>
Gray, G.	<i>The Warriors</i>
Kristol, I.	"On Equality"
Kuhn, T.	<i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i>
Malcolm, N.	<i>Ludwig Wittgenstein: a Memoir</i>
Mill, J. S.	<i>On Liberty</i>
Plato	<i>Meno</i> in DIALOGUES OF PLATO <i>Laches</i> in DIALOGUES OF PLATO
Rawls, J.	"Justice as Fairness," <i>A Theory of Justice</i>
Sagan, C.	<i>The Dragons of Eden</i>
Sinsheimer, R. L.	"The Presumptions of Science"
Thoreau, H.	<i>Civil Disobedience</i>
Watson, J.	<i>The Double Helix</i>
Wilson, E. O.	<i>Human Nature</i>
Wright, R. W.	"Those Were Some of the Happiest Days of My Life," <i>Rhode Islander</i> , 27 Nov 1977

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

There are numerous biographies, memoirs, and histories covering the American prisoner-of-war (POW) experience in Vietnam. The items listed below are provided for those wishing to learn more about Stockdale's experience and those of other Navy POWs. In addition to Vice Admiral Stockdale's writings, we especially commend to readers Porter Halyburton's story as told by James Hirsch in *Two Souls Indivisible*, listed below. Professor Halyburton, a professor emeritus at the Naval War College, was integral to this project and authored the book's foreword.

- Alvarez, Everett, Jr., and Anthony S. Pitch. *Chained Eagle: The Heroic Story of the First American Shot Down over North Vietnam*. Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005.
- Blakey, Scott. *Prisoner at War: The Survival of Commander Richard A. Stratton*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978.
- Coffee, Gerald [Capt., USN (Ret.)]. *Beyond Survival: Building on the Hard Times—a POW's Inspiring Story*. New York: Putnam, 1990.
- Hirsch, James S. *Two Souls Indivisible: The Friendship That Saved Two POWs in Vietnam*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004.
- Hubbell, John G. *P.O.W.: A Definitive History of the American Prisoner-of-War Experience in Vietnam, 1964–1973*. New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1976.
- McGrath, John M. [Lt. Cdr., USN]. *Prisoner of War: Six Years in Hanoi*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011.
- Rochester, Stuart I. *The Battle behind Bars: Navy and Marine POWs in the Vietnam War*. Washington, DC: U.S. Navy Dept., Naval History and Heritage Command, 2010.
- Rochester, Stuart I., and Frederick T. Kiley. *Honor Bound: American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1961–1973*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007.
- Stockdale, James Bond. *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1995.
- Stockdale, James Bond [Vice Adm., USN (Ret.)]. *A Vietnam Experience: Ten Years of Reflection*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1984.
- Stockdale, Jim, and Sybil Stockdale. *In Love and War: The Story of a Family's Ordeal and Sacrifice during the Vietnam Years*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990.



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